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Rachel Ashcroft

Time in the Works of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and Giordano Bruno  
(1548-1600)

This thesis explores the philosophical concept of time through a detailed comparison of Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* with Giordano Bruno's six-text series of Italian dialogues. Modern scholarship in the field of time studies has either ignored the true significance of the 16th century, or relied on familiar tropes - including Christian eschatology and apocalyptic end-times - to define time from this period. Instead, this thesis demonstrates that Montaigne and Bruno are excellent examples of two thinkers whose innovative thought led them to consider time in radically different ways to standard 16th-century conceptions of temporality. I use a new conceptual methodology of 'embodied time' in order to explore the dichotomy that arises between mental perceptions of time and the physical effects of time. Initially, both Montaigne and Bruno employ images of corruptible bodies in time to emphasise the linear, uncontrollable nature of human time. Yet both thinkers use the temporal freedom of the mind to experiment with seemingly rigid characteristics of time such as death, ageing and change. Montaigne revisits his own near-death experience and rethinks attitudes towards suicide in order to exercise a degree of control over time while Bruno's radical cosmology dramatically subverts traditional responses to human mortality. Such discussions reveal a willingness to challenge the seemingly rigid nature of time which is simply not reflected in general scholarship on 16th-century time. Furthermore, eternity emphasises the temporal impermanence that characterises human time. This notion of temporal flux leads both Montaigne and Bruno to explore how individuals should utilise the time at hand, which in both cases leads to a call for deep and studied introspection. Finally, their exploration of custom and time reveals a fascinating relationship between the two concepts that holds serious repercussions for the productive use of time they both exhort.

Time in the Works of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and  
Giordano Bruno (1548-1600)

Rachel Ashcroft

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD  
School of Modern Languages and Cultures  
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## Introduction

In 1536, the great reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote on the doctrine of original sin that ‘original sin [...] is not substantially or essentially destroyed except in the conflagration of fire by which the whole world and our bodies will be completely purified on the last day. When we have been reduced to dust, then at last sins will be entirely extinguished’.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, he defined original sin within a typical understanding of time in 16th-century Western European society. Christianity believed that human history was moving from the Creation story of Genesis - when the time of men began - towards the Final Judgement or ‘last day’ when humans and the whole world would return to dust. This conception of time was distinctly linear in nature - it possessed a clear beginning to time and an equally clear ending. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus declared himself the arbiter of human time: ‘I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last’.<sup>2</sup> One of the early Church fathers, St. Augustine of Hippo (354 AD-430 AD), described such time in his book of Christian philosophy, *The City of God* (426 AD), as ‘newness, with nothing repeated’, always moving forward - time was ‘the *rectum iter*, the *vita recta*, which is the Christ’.<sup>3</sup> Over one thousand years later, Luther was merely echoing a long tradition of Christian eschatology that considered time as a phenomenon tied to collective human history that was always moving towards a very specific end-point.

Modern-day scholars working in the field of time studies often characterise this view as one of the most important aspects of 16th-century time.<sup>4</sup> Although the Reformation had divided Europe along sectarian lines by the latter half of the century, critics have repeatedly turned to linear time as one concept which appeared to transcend

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, ‘The Disputation Concerning Justification, 1536’, in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, vol. 34, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan & Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986), p. 164. See also Luther, ‘Lectures on Galatians, 1535’, vol. 26: ‘Meanwhile, as long as we are alive, we are supported and nourished at the bosom of divine mercy and forbearance, until the body of sin is abolished and we are raised up as new beings *on that Day*. Then there will be new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness will dwell’ (p. 235).

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 22:13.

<sup>3</sup> Henri-Charles Puech, ‘Gnosis and Time’, in *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, *Eranos 3: Man and Time*, ed. by Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 38-84 (p. 50). The original Latin from *City of God* reads ‘novitas, nullo repetita, nullo repetenda circuitu’. See Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. by Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, n.d.) in Loeb Classical Library <www.loebclassics.com>.

<sup>4</sup> See Arthur Hilary Armstrong & Robert A. Markus, ‘Time, History, Eternity’, in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1960), pp. 116-134; Constantinos A. Patrides, *The Phoenix and the Ladder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).



the different branches of Christianity that were emerging in the late 1500s. Krzysztof Pomian states that ‘aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles, l’histoire événementielle acquiert un sens grâce à une théologie de l’histoire’.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, despite the ramifications of the term ‘Renaissance’ with its suggestions of rebirth, renewal and the humanist interest in the revival of Antiquity, in the years following the Reformation, it was still common to believe in the idea of ‘un temps linéaire et irréversible’ that was rooted firmly in Christian doctrine.<sup>6</sup> Thus a millenarian obsession with the end of time has often been attributed to the 16th century. ‘Taking 4000 B.C. as the date of Creation, Luther calculated that men were already in the sixth and last age of universal history - the age of the Pope’.<sup>7</sup> Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield argue that ‘while few of Luther’s contemporaries in Northern Europe were such extreme pessimists, something of his gloom coloured the beliefs and attitudes of all educated men’.<sup>8</sup> The idea of an imminent end-time appeared to transcend religious divisions and dominated 16th-century views of the future.

Modern scholarship has also noted that certain celestial events appeared to support the popular notion that time was coming to an end. In 1524, a close grouping of the five planets visible to the naked eye occurred; a new star emerged in the constellation of Cassiopeia from 1572 to 1574, and a comet appeared in the sky in 1577. In a continent which was already being devastated by bloody religious wars and sectarianism, such unexpected phenomena ‘only confirmed the widespread pessimism’ inherent in 16th-century society and fuelled further social anxiety about the end of time.<sup>9</sup> Discussing the observation of satellites around Jupiter in 1610, M.A. Granada suggests that these planets formed part of an eschatological timeframe that had been repeatedly reinforced throughout the 16th century: ‘les planètes...s’inséraient dans le cadre des nouveautés célestes (des novas, des comètes et d’autres signes envoyés par Dieu) qui préudent au

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<sup>5</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, *L’ordre du temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 49. Pomian argues that while elements of cyclical time were developing amongst the reformers, in the years following the Reformation a linear time existed that aimed to trace a direct line of virtuous Church fathers from the early days of Christianity to the 16th century. I return to the idea of 16th-century cyclical time at various points throughout this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen E. Toulmin & June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 76. The concept of millenarianism in Renaissance Europe has received more attention from modern scholars; see Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu : la violence au temps des troubles de religions (vers 1525 - vers 1610)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. These discoveries troubled the cosmological status quo concerning the unchanging firmament of the stars. See Chapter Two, ‘Context: 16th-Century Futures’; also Pietro Redondi, *Storie del tempo* (Rome: Laterza, 2007), pp. 103-104. The 1524 planetary conjunction in the sign of Pisces was believed to signal an impending deluge. See Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), ‘6 - Between Astrology and Prophecy: The Flood of 1524’.

temps eschatologique'.<sup>10</sup> An obsession emerged with the year 1588, which theologians predicted would bring widespread famine, plague and disease: 'some thinkers, religious men in particular, even thought it might mark the end of man's time on earth'.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, many present-day critics have judged that 'age-old religiously and astrologically inspired millenarian ideas held powerful sway' in the 16th century.<sup>12</sup>

While efforts have been made to draw out other aspects of time from this period, it appears that any discussion amongst modern scholars concerning time in the 16th century has often been overshadowed by the nature of how time might end. This tendency to focus on what J.K. Barret has termed 'apocalyptic ends of time' has been supported by literature reviews in two very promising and recent studies of time in the Renaissance which both seek to go beyond these images.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the introduction to her monograph *Untold Futures: Time and Literary Culture in Renaissance England* (2016), Barret highlights the research gap that has emerged due to the tendency of previous critics to consistently attach religious or apocalyptic symbols to ideas of time in the 16th century:

Religious paradigms are repeatedly reinforced as the most important component of the earlier period's future. As a result, the scholarship that reconstructs Reformation religious discourse about salvation and endtime sidesteps an interest in the earthly future, while those studies that view in the early modern period the precursor for secularization tacitly subscribe to modernity as the future. The implications are twofold: first, a presumption that no one thought about the future except vis-à-vis Christian paradigms; second, an implicit association between a future characterized by open-endedness and modernity.<sup>14</sup>

It appears that wider Christian eschatology often forms the basis of how present-day scholars begin to define temporality during this period, with associated themes of impermanence, transition and apocalypse punctuating these discussions. Barret also

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<sup>10</sup> M.A. Granada, 'Helisaeus Röslin: 4 Esdras et l'avènement du royaume du Christ' in *Le temps des astronomes: l'astronomie et le décompte du temps de Pierre d'Ailly à Newton*, ed. by Edouard Mehl & Nicolas Roudet, pp. 123-149 (pp. 124-125).

<sup>11</sup> C. Scott Dixon, 'Popular Astrology and Lutheran Propaganda in Reformation Germany', *History*, 84.275 (1999), pp. 403-418 (p. 403).

<sup>12</sup> David W. Pankenier, 'The Planetary Portent of 1524 in China and Europe', *Journal of World History*, 20.3 (2009), pp. 339-375 (p. 339). Other 'familiar tropes' used to describe 16th-century time include the popular symbol of 'Father Time', an image depicting an old man - usually carrying a scythe or sickle - who represented relentless, devouring time. For a fascinating explanation of this image in Renaissance art, see Erwin Panofsky, 'Father Time', in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 69-94. See also 'Da Kronos al Padre Tempo' in Redondi, *Storie del tempo*, pp. 38-54.

<sup>13</sup> J.K. Barret, *Untold Futures: Time and Literary Culture in Renaissance England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

alludes to the repercussions of this approach in respect of 16th-century time and its ‘modernity’, an issue I discuss in more detail below. Meanwhile, in her monograph entitled *Transformations of Time and Temporality* (2014), the art historian Simona Cohen also argues that, rather than a uniform Christian eschatology becoming the accepted temporal framework in the Renaissance, there was a vast difference in attitudes towards time between the early humanists of the 15th century ‘and those that emerged in the context of the sixteenth century social, political and religious debates and conflicts’.<sup>15</sup> During a period of religious and political upheaval, new ways of viewing time were beginning to appear. Cohen explores how and why the linear time described above existed alongside popular non-linear conceptions of temporality such as *Kairos*, the Greco-Roman notion of a decisive and expedient moment.<sup>16</sup>

Following these recent trends, it is the view of this thesis that time in the 16th century was not solely understood through a religious lens. Instead, thinkers frequently discussed temporality in terms that did not refer at all to Christian notions of history or collective end times, and in some cases, such ideas were being actively contradicted. I concentrate on two thinkers whom I believe exemplify these new conceptions of time: Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and Giordano Bruno (1548-1600). Montaigne sought to understand time as it became apparent to the individual through ageing, change, and death. He famously remarked that he used his writing, which drew on a combination of personal experience and classical philosophy, in order to record the changing individual over time: ‘Je ne peints pas l'estre, je peints le passage’ (III.II.805).<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Bruno’s cosmological theories required a dramatic re-thinking of time on Earth and its place within a heliocentric, infinite universe. In particular, his notion of ‘la ruota del tempo’ (*Furori* II.661) - a reworking of the more familiar 16th-century image of fortune’s turning wheel - necessarily departed from the linear conception of Christian historical time presented above and instead presented an infinite universe in which matter and form were constantly renewed.<sup>18</sup> This thesis explores some of the most significant responses to time presented by Montaigne and Bruno as a result of these approaches. Why does a near-

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<sup>15</sup> Simona Cohen, *Transformations of Time and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> See Cohen, ‘Chapter 8 - *Kairos/Occasio* - Vicissitudes of Propitious Time from Antiquity to the Renaissance’.

<sup>17</sup> All primary source quotations from the *Essais* are taken from Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Villey & V.L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965). The format of all in-text citations reads as follows: (Volume number.Chapter number.Page number).

<sup>18</sup> All primary source quotations from Bruno’s series of Italian dialogues (see footnote 19 below) are taken from Giordano Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, ed. by Nuccio Ordine, 2 vols (Turin: UTET, 2002). The format of all in-text citations reads as follows: (Name of work.Volume number.Page number).

fatal accident lead Montaigne to recount his own 'death' after falling from a horse - 'moy dix ou douze pas au delà, mort' (II.VI.373)? Why does Bruno appear to deny the existence of death altogether, 'e però né per sé né per accidente alcuno può esser detta morire' (*Causa* II.181)? I will attempt to set forth how and why such thinkers displayed an eagerness to experiment with time in exciting and innovative ways. In doing so, I hope to present a deeply complex picture of 16th-century time.

### *Time in the 16th century?*

This thesis argues that the representations of time in both Montaigne's *Essais* and Bruno's Italian dialogues are simply not reflected in most modern scholarship about time in the 1500s.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, it would be useful here to briefly consider some of the main definitions of 16th-century time that have been suggested by scholars from the last century.<sup>20</sup> However, this arguably presents a difficult task. During the initial stages of research, it quickly became apparent that modern scholars tasked with documenting broader histories of time - covering time in different cultures across centuries and even millennia of history - have perhaps overlooked the importance of the 16th century, whether such critics were focusing on chronology or indeed the evolution of philosophical definitions of time. Pietro Redondi's *Storie del tempo* (2007) - which traces the measurement and depiction of time in the history of Western literature, art and culture - focuses heavily on the chronological innovations of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695) and Isaac Newton (1643-1727). In comparison, little attention is given over to thinkers from the 16th century.<sup>21</sup> Anthony Aveni's lengthy study *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks and Cultures* (1989) - which explores chronology in various societies from around the world - features only eight passing references to the 16th century. Aveni alludes to the effects of the age's bloody colonial expansion while

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<sup>19</sup> Bruno's 'Italian dialogues' refer to the six philosophical dialogues published in the vernacular between 1584 and 1585. Some scholars also include Bruno's satirical play *Candelaio* (1582) in this series - for more on this debate see Nuccio Ordine, 'Introduzione' in Giordano Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, ed. by Nuccio Ordine, 2 vols (Turin: UTET, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> In Chapter One, 'Popular definitions of time in the 16th century', I summarise some of the main currents of classical philosophy that informed later Christian-Scholastic conceptions of time.

<sup>21</sup> The only exception is a brief chapter, less than ten pages long, entitled 'La simmetria del tempo' which focuses solely on the findings of Copernicus as a precursor to Galileo and other thinkers.

simultaneously omitting any detailed explanation of 16th-century notions of time.<sup>22</sup> Hervé Barreau's extended introduction to the history of time in *Le temps* (2009) passes directly from the concerns of 'les théologiens médiévaux' to the scientific developments of 'la physique moderne' without comment on the Renaissance.<sup>23</sup> Initially, G.J. Whitrow's *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (1989) appears to be more promising - Chapter 8 is entitled 'Time and History in the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution'.<sup>24</sup> However, the discussion favours analysis of the invention of the pendulum clock and 'the achievement of greater precision in mechanical timekeeping in the second half of the seventeenth century'.<sup>25</sup> 16th-century time is summarised by familiar tropes including its 'backwards looking tendency', another typical characteristic of time from this period which - according to Whitrow - arose from a seemingly uniform obsession with Antiquity.<sup>26</sup>

The 1500s fare slightly better in studies which approach time through the lens of historical consciousness. French scholar François Hartog recognises that something new was happening in the Renaissance concerning notions of history. For example, Hartog examines the belief amongst certain early modern thinkers that present society required an ironic act of *renovatio* through the restitution of classical Roman ideals; such an idea conflicted with the linear 'nullo repetita, nullo repetenda circuitu' of eschatological time.<sup>27</sup> However, this thesis is concerned with the immediate human experience of time rather than collective ideas of human history, and in this respect there often appears to be far greater detailed attention devoted to St. Augustine of Hippo (354 AD-430 AD) and the Late Antique; the Middle Ages with its reliance on the temporal cycles of Nature and

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<sup>22</sup> See Anthony Aveni, *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks and Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p. 129 for a very brief discussion of Joseph Scaliger's impact on the 16th-century understanding of calendrical beginnings. Arguably one finds a more comprehensive explanation of 16th-century chronology in Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The History of Time: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See 'Chapter Three - Prehistory and the History of the Calendar' for a short summary of the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>23</sup> Hervé Barreau, *Le temps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), pp. 12-19.

<sup>24</sup> G.J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine of Hippo, XII.21. See François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Seuil, 2003). Hartog discusses Montaigne and his visit to Rome; see 'Rome' pp. 176-185. See also Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) and Zachary Sayre Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017) for an introduction to current scholarship on historical time in the Renaissance.

daily religious ceremony; and finally the 17th century and the subsequent development of 'Newtonian time'.<sup>28</sup>

In each of these cases, there is a consistent tradition of modern scholarship, which only serves to highlight the lack of attention towards time in the 16th century. St. Augustine famously proposed in the *Confessions* (c. 400 AD) that time existed in the mind - 'it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time'.<sup>29</sup> The far-reaching influence of this definition appears not only in studies devoted to time in Augustine's works but is also referenced in nearly every other history of time from the 20th and 21st centuries. There is also substantial research dedicated to time in both Antiquity and the Middle Ages by scholars from Richard Sorabji to Jacques Le Goff.<sup>30</sup> Sorabji's *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (1983) has proved invaluable in tracing the influence of ancient philosophers such as Heraclitus, Lucretius and Plato on later Medieval concerns and assessing key questions of temporality, i.e. is time real? Does time flow or stand still? Did the universe have a beginning? Le Goff's assessment of the impact of historical and societal change on conceptions of time in *Time, Work and Culture* (1980) is still highly relevant today, while Pasquale Porro has recently edited a valuable collection of essays on Medieval time which explores the Muslim philosopher Averroes' influence on Scholastic debates about time, as well as eternity and the concept of *aeuum* or 'angelic time'. Finally, scholarship on 20th-century definitions of time consistently engages with the challenges that philosophers currently face when presented with emerging scientific theories such as quantum physics and relativity.<sup>31</sup> With a handful of exceptions to be discussed in the literature review, it is reasonable to argue that time in the Renaissance, much less the 16th

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<sup>28</sup> Donald J. Wilcox emphasises the importance of Isaac Newton's absolute time and its influence on what he terms the relative time of modernity. Such ideas are contrasted with the 'pre-Newtonian' times of the centuries preceding the 17th century; see Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

<sup>29</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 242.

<sup>30</sup> See Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); also Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Wilhelm Streckert, *Le temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Age, IIIe-XIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cnrs, 1984). For time in Antiquity see Duncan Kennedy, *Antiquity and the Meanings of Time: a Philosophy of Ancient and Modern Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013). Notable studies devoted to researching time in the Middle Ages include *The Medieval Concept of Time*, ed. by Pasquale Porro (Boston: Brill, 2001); Richard Lock, *Aspects of Time in Medieval Literature* (New York: Garland, 1985); Wesley M. Stevens, *Cycles of Time and Scientific Learning in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> One such challenge is the conundrum posed by the metaphysician J.M.E. McTaggart on the unreality of time and his introduction of the 'A' and 'B' series into theories of time. See Robin Le Poidevin and Murray MacBeath, eds., *The Philosophy of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). For more on post-Enlightenment theories of time see David Couzens Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).

century, has not received the same amount of attention as Antiquity, the Middle Ages or the extended period spanning the Enlightenment through to the present day.

As well as a simple lack of distinguished scholarship, the large quantity of research which focuses on time in the periods surrounding the 16th century has created another difficulty. When present-day critics do refer to this period in relation to the Middle Ages or the 17th century, they have often attempted to do so by fitting it into a pre-arranged narrative, suggesting that thinkers in the 16th century were simultaneously rejecting the temporal concerns of the Middle Ages and somehow anticipating the ‘modernity’ of Newton’s advances. G.J. Whitrow summarises attitudes towards past time in the 16th century through his comparison with 17th-century thinkers, whom he claims preferred to look forward to the potential of the future rather than focus excessively on the teachings of Ancient Greece and Rome: ‘In the course of the seventeenth century the pessimistic and backward-looking attitudes to time that had characterised the previous century were gradually replaced by optimistic and forward-looking views’.<sup>32</sup> Since the 1970s, Ricardo Quinones has written various articles and chapters on time in the Renaissance; his most well-known work on the topic is *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (1972).<sup>33</sup> Quinones’ contribution is an excellent foundation to understanding time in the 16th century and is still one of the only monographs devoted solely to studying conceptions of time in the Renaissance. However, while Quinones regularly acknowledges the Medieval attitudes towards time that survived into the Renaissance - such as a preoccupation with the afterlife - he still tends to characterise Renaissance time as a stepping stone towards a fully-fledged 17th-century modernity.<sup>34</sup> For example, Quinones claims that Montaigne is ‘modern’ because he seemingly rejects the religious obsession with a time beyond life on

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<sup>32</sup> Whitrow, *Time in History*, p. 134. This bizarre characterisation of 16th-century attitudes towards time is justified by the fact that in the early 1600s, Francis Bacon wrote an unpublished essay entitled *Temporis partus masculus* or ‘The Masculine birth of time’. This signified Bacon’s faith in the idea that science should be sought from the truth of nature and not ‘the darkness of antiquity’, p. 135.

<sup>33</sup> Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, two notable scholars who have contributed towards historical attitudes towards death have proved themselves to be highly aware of the nuanced evolutions between centuries. Alberto Tenenti clearly traces the changing attitudes towards time that evolved between the 14th and 16th centuries in *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957). Philippe Ariès is another historian of attitudes towards death in Western Europe and again proves to be more aware of how conceptions of time change even across fifty-year periods. See Philippe Ariès, *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

Earth, but this assertion is dangerous since it automatically equates time in the 17th century and beyond with secularism.<sup>35</sup>

In recent years, critics studying aspects of time in the 16th and 17th centuries have become distinctly aware of the limitations of such an approach. John Spencer Hill labels this approach as ‘post-Enlightenment prejudice’ which assumes that any non-religious view of time in the Renaissance ‘must necessarily be a material anticipation of post-Renaissance scepticism and secularism’.<sup>36</sup> Michael Edwards states that ‘viewing early modern theories of time solely through a Newtonian lens can distort our perspective strikingly’ as thinkers in the 1500s could not have predicted the creation of absolute time.<sup>37</sup> While this thesis acknowledges where currents of thought have been clearly adopted from previous centuries or may even have influenced successive cultures, I will avoid any attempt to explain 16th-century time solely through Medieval and post-Newtonian theories of time. In particular, this study will demonstrate that it is impossible to place time in the works of either Montaigne or Bruno into such a narrative since their approaches to temporality are often different even from other unconventional thinkers of their age.

I will argue that where 16th-century time has been studied or analysed to any degree, scholars often highlight the same general attitudes towards time in a uniformity that does not reflect the complexity of responses to time in both Montaigne’s *Essais* and Bruno’s series of Italian dialogues. I believe that analysing the work of these two thinkers reveals an understanding of time that does not align with previous statements by critics on the types of Renaissance ‘destructive’ time described above, i.e., time that was seemingly beyond the control of an individual. As Quinones has previously suggested, Montaigne rejected many mainstream developments in Renaissance temporality<sup>38</sup>; meanwhile, Sarah Hutton, discussing Bruno’s response to Aristotle, claims that ‘Bruno is seeking to substitute an alternative theory of time’.<sup>39</sup> Therefore in this thesis, I argue that certain thinkers in 16th century Europe possessed an understanding of time that largely

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<sup>35</sup> As stated above, Quinones traces the influence of Medieval time and its largely spiritual nature on the early modern period; yet he does so within a framework that eventually equates the centuries beyond with secularity: ‘For the Christian Middle Ages, “everything in the world was an effect of something beyond the world; everything in life was a step to something beyond life.” [...] But Montaigne would have us focus on the thing at hand, in itself, and find our fulfilment in its own basic worth. His modernity lies here’ (*Discovery of Time*, p. 205).

<sup>36</sup> John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith and Time* (Buffalo, N.Y.: McGill-Queen’s University, 1997), p. xi.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Edwards, *Time and Science of the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Quinones, *Discovery of Time*, p. 204. ‘Montaigne stood in determined opposition to many of the larger developments in Renaissance temporal response’.

<sup>39</sup> Hutton, p. 355.



rejected the temporal concerns that have traditionally been associated with their age by previous scholars. While time is not the sole focus of their respective bodies of work, I propose that when Montaigne and Bruno explore temporality, they do so without reference to apocalyptic end-times. Instead they experiment with concepts of time that lay on the fringes of acceptable religious and philosophical belief in the 16th century.

Naturally, several research questions result from this initial thesis statement. In both the Introduction and Chapter One, I explain my choice of Bruno and Montaigne in this study by emphasising that the originality of thought common to both thinkers naturally lead to a tendency to experiment with traditional conceptions of time. Furthermore, Chapters One, Two and Three assess the understanding of time that Montaigne and Bruno work from, while Chapter Four explores how this definition of time affects certain aspects of Montaigne's and Bruno's thought, particularly their attitude towards custom. I hope to provide answers as to how the representations of time proposed by these two thinkers often differ greatly in respect to the 16th-century temporal concerns established by modern critics.

### *Delineations and Limitations*

In light of the research areas (and subsequent research questions) identified above, I have chosen to focus my study on the works of two of the most recognisable thinkers of this period - Michel de Montaigne and Giordano Bruno. The influential German scholar Hugo Friedrich very briefly but importantly labelled them as 'the two most original philosophical products of the sixteenth century'.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Montaigne and Bruno have already been identified and studied (separately) as thinkers with well-founded claims to originality.

In the case of Montaigne, this perceived inventiveness often stems from Montaigne's writing style in the *Essais*. Terence Cave notes that Montaigne's fluctuating, shifting and changing writing is still one of the most original attempts to pin down the flow of human thought: 'His reflections are thought-experiments rather than propositions or statements of position, and collectively they make up what is probably the richest and most productive thought-experiment ever committed to paper'.<sup>41</sup> Montaigne's commitment to speaking firmly in his own voice was extremely rare in the

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<sup>40</sup> Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> Terence Cave, *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta, 2007), p. 95.

16th century, and the author himself was certainly aware of this, declaring of his text that ‘c’est le seul livre au monde de son espece, d’un dessein farouche et extravagant’ (II.208). Consequently, Ian Maclean has unravelled the various ways in which Montaigne defies any neat classification as a philosopher; his ‘dessein farouche et extravagant’ in the *Essais* is characterised by an unsystematic use of personal anecdote and moral reflection to reach open-ended conclusions.<sup>42</sup> As a result, Maclean and several other Montaigne scholars have declared the French thinker to be entirely unphilosophical in his writing. More often than not, Montaigne’s writing is characterised by ambiguity and contradiction rather than a desire to provide absolute answers to life’s major questions.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, Bruno was developing an alternative cosmology in the Italian dialogues and beyond that completely subverted the cosmological status quo in the 16th century. These texts, written in the Italian vernacular rather than the more traditional Latin, were published in quick succession between 1584 and 1585; Bruno’s radical theories were clearly ‘opening out to him as quickly as he could write them down’.<sup>44</sup> In particular, Bruno believed that the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) had not gone far enough in setting forth a heliocentric cosmos and instead Bruno posited an infinite universe with infinite solar systems, ‘un corporel infini et homogène tant dans l’espace que dans le temps’.<sup>45</sup> Such theories were incompatible with the Scholastic philosophical and theological worldview throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. As we will see, Bruno employed several literary strategies - satire, mixing genres, textual alter-egos - to present his philosophy to 16th-century audiences in an accessible way.

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<sup>42</sup> Ian Maclean, ‘Montaigne and the Truth of the Schools’, *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. by Ulrich Langer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 142-162. Maclean lists the many ways in which Montaigne flouts philosophical convention: ‘He sets out to write not impersonally but personally, not comprehensively but partially and inconsistently, not supra-temporally but consciously immersed in the passage of time; he relies on an unsystematic mixture of anecdote, quotation, and moral reflection, into which in the course of the last twelve years of his life he interpolated intermittently yet more thoughts and quotations; his text rarely takes on the character of a sustained argument that is explicit about its own forms of validation. He is even willing knowingly to breach the rule of non-contradiction, and yet claim not to breach truth-conditions...’ (p. 144). For more on Montaigne’s use of language, see André Tournon, *Route par Ailleurs: le ‘nouveau langage’ des Essais* (Paris: Champion, 2006); also Ian Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> Ian Maclean, ‘Montaigne and the Truth of the Schools’, p. 144.

<sup>44</sup> Ingrid Rowland, ‘Introduction’, in Giordano Bruno, *On the Heroic Frenzies*, trans. by Ingrid D. Rowland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). References will be made wherever appropriate to other works by both Bruno and Montaigne, particularly in Chapter One. However, I believe that within the six texts that constitute the Italian dialogues, there is certainly sufficient material to explore in relation to time and temporality.

<sup>45</sup> Miguel A. Granada, ‘Introduction’, in Giordano Bruno, *Des fureurs héroïques*, ed. by Miguel A. Granada (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999). ‘La série des dialogues italiens, que Bruno commence de publier à Londres quelques mois plus tard, constitue la riposte ou la vengeance de Bruno. Il ne s’agissait pas, cependant d’une simple question personnelle, mais d’une bataille “épochale” “ celle de la défense et revendication de la philosophie, comme entreprise héroïque, face à sa négation et à son occultation dans l’univers vulgaire de la pédanterie...”’ (p. xiv).

While this thesis accepts that Montaigne and Bruno were not the only 16th-century thinkers to contemplate the world in new and exciting ways, I believe that examining time in their works will help to close another particular research gap. Montaigne and Bruno were both writing during the last decades of the 1500s, a period even within the 16th century that has frequently been overlooked by studies on time. A small number of recent critics have already researched 14th to mid 16th century France and Italy in detail. Simona Cohen states that she has researched art history from the early and mid-Renaissance due to an erroneous belief that studies of time in literature from the 14th to the 16th century ‘have not been lacking’.<sup>46</sup> Emmanuelle Lacore-Martin has produced an extensive monograph on conceptions of time in the works of the French humanist François Rabelais (1494-1553) which includes reflections on calendrical and cosmic times.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to this focus on the first half of the 16th century, many recent works concentrate on late 16th- and early 17th-century English thinkers, particularly Francis Bacon (1561-1621) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Barret’s recent monograph is devoted entirely to rethinking conceptions of time in the works of English Renaissance writers, including Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (c.1588) and *The Faerie Queene* (1590) by Edmund Spenser (1552-1599). Hill has produced a valuable study of time and faith in the Renaissance which devotes the second half of the text to assessing time in Shakespeare (amongst other chapters on Augustine and Henri Bergson (1859-1941)).<sup>48</sup> Their contemporaries on the continent have not received the same amount of attention. In conclusion, continental Europeans writing on time in the latter half of the 16th century have arguably been overlooked to a certain degree. Therefore, I have deliberately limited my discussion to the works of Montaigne and Bruno. In doing so, I hope that this approach will contribute new and original ideas to existing scholarship in this area by assessing diverse approaches to time in the last decades of the 1500s.

In addition to the shared sense of innovation that has been attributed to both thinkers, I believe that a comparison between Montaigne and Bruno will build upon a minimal but growing area of study which has already begun to identify potential connections between the two thinkers. Arguably present-day scholars have avoided lengthy comparison of Montaigne and Bruno after considering how different their

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<sup>46</sup> Cohen, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Emmanuelle Lacore-Martin, *Figures de l’histoire et du temps dans l’oeuvre de Rabelais* (Paris: Droz, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> See John Spencer Hill, ‘Time in Shakespeare’; G.F. Waller, *The Strong Necessity of Time: the Philosophy of Time in Shakespeare and Elizabethan Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976). See also Ricardo J. Quinones, ‘Views of Time in Shakespeare’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 26.3 (1965), pp. 327-352. In *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* Quinones devotes chapters to Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare, as well as Montaigne.

intellectual objectives appear to be at first glance. However, many modern critics have already suggested how fruitful a large-scale comparison between the two thinkers would be, with some scholars even mentioning time as a potential starting point. In a relatively obscure article (yet significant for the purposes of this thesis), G.F. Waller explicitly identifies both Montaigne and Bruno as two thinkers who did not conform to standard conceptions of time in the 1500s: ‘There are signs that in the works of Montaigne and Bruno, in particular, new attitudes of time are being explored’.<sup>49</sup> However, Waller does not build upon this connection in his short article and leaves this enticing remark completely unexplored. Michele Ciliberto has recently stated that there are in fact similarities between the two thinkers and even suggests time as one potential starting point.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Fulvio Papi paved the way for a comparison between the two intellectuals by outlining connections between both thinkers’ interaction with the New World. This thesis builds on the research that these scholars have begun by producing the first ever full-length study to compare the two thinkers.

Naturally, I have been forced to curtail some aspects of the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues in a bid to compose a coherent and well-structured thesis. In particular, I have avoided extensive analysis of the chronological layers inherent in Montaigne’s text. Here I refer to the staggered publication of the *Essais* and Montaigne’s subsequent additions, corrections and deletions to his original work. The first two volumes of the text appeared in 1580, while Montaigne published volume III in 1588 alongside significant revisions to the first two books. In 1595, his protégée Marie de Gournay published the first posthumous edition of the *Essais* which contained various corrections Montaigne made to a 1588 copy of the text (known as the *exemplaire de Bordeaux*) alongside several other additions, the authenticity of which is still under dispute.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the order in which Montaigne arranged the chapters of his first two books was not based on chronology (‘Apologie de Raimond Sebond’ (II.XII)’ was written after ‘De l’Institution des Enfants’ (I.XXVI)), while his subsequent revisions range from the deletion of single

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<sup>49</sup> G.F. Waller, ‘Transition in Renaissance Ideas of Time and the Place of Giordano Bruno’, *Neophilologus*, 55 (1971), pp. 3-15 (p. 7). Waller is arguably one of the earliest proponents of the idea that in the Renaissance there were several thinkers working outside traditional temporal norms; he identifies some Renaissance thinkers as ‘confusedly or explicitly, no longer setting a discussion of time within the traditional religious framework and that, earlier than has generally been recognised, some quite radical alternative views were developing’ (p. 3). However, while these ideas are sound, I have drawn upon the more recent work of Barret and Cohen who actively avoid following a history of ideas approach in the manner of earlier scholars such as Waller.

<sup>50</sup> Michele Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno: il teatro della vita* (Milan: Mondadori, 2007), p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the relationship between Montaigne and Marie de Gournay, see Arnould, Jean-Claude, ed., *Marie de Gournay et l’édition de 1595 des « Essais » de Montaigne* (Paris: H. Champion, 1996).

words to the addition of extensive pages of text.<sup>52</sup> Naturally, an entire area of scholarship has devoted itself to examining the changing editions and revisions that the *Essais* underwent both during and after Montaigne's lifetime; critics writing monographs on the reception of the text have often illustrated these developments as evidence of the temporally shifting nature of the text. However, the present study compares Montaigne with Bruno, and sustained analysis of the many repetitions and deletions inherent in the *Essais* would arguably prove distracting to the reader when attempting to make explicit connections between ideas of time in Montaigne and Bruno.

Instead, I must acknowledge that the *Essais* are not 'stationary' texts while also limiting my references to chronological layers. Rather I have discussed them at various points concerning Montaigne and 'writing the self', La Boétie's friendship and the quest for truth in the *Essais*. Furthermore, my own textual analysis loosely imitates the creative projects contained in both Montaigne and Bruno's writing by visiting and revisiting temporal concepts such as death from ever-more complex perspectives. As stated above, Montaigne's writing style is defined by his changing, often contradictory remarks on a range of subjects; his additions and revisions to the 1580 and 1588 editions bear witness to an internal dialogical process. Meanwhile, Bruno's explosion of creativity between 1584 and 1585 is a testament to his philosophy, which was urgently refined and corrected with the publication of each new text. The philosophical dialogues of the earlier texts, combined with the unique blend of poetic form and extended conversation between interlocutors (particularly in the *Eroici Furori*), express Bruno's openly dialogical creative project. His manipulation of different characters allows Bruno to satirise the opinions of thinkers he does not agree with and insert a literary mouth-piece into the text as he continues to refine his philosophy with the publication of each book. Although my thesis does not explore this process through detailed textual analysis, I have attempted to reflect their open-ended creative process by structuring my own investigation of concepts such as death through a layered exploration which spans entire chapters rather than paragraphs or chapter sections alone.

I would also like to briefly note that I will limit any references to the depiction of fortune, hazard, and chance in the works of Montaigne and Bruno. Fortune and other such concepts in the Renaissance constitute a consistently popular area of study amongst scholars of the early modern period, and a lot of excellent research already exists in this

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<sup>52</sup> Michel Jeanneret reminds us that this was highly characteristic of the Renaissance. Works were often presented as unfinished or 'in progress'; once a text was published it often received corrections or supplements. See Jeanneret's introduction in *Perpetuum mobile. Métamorphoses des corps et des oeuvres de Vinci à Montaigne* (Paris: Macula, 1997).

area.<sup>53</sup> Fortune itself has experienced a long history regarding its evolving portrayals over time. As I mentioned above, Fortune was often represented by the ‘ruota del tempo’ or turning wheel, an image which originated in Ancient Rome and survived well into the 16th century (so that thinkers such as Bruno were able to manipulate it). From the image of Fortuna as a blind deity to Niccolò Machiavelli’s distinct portrayal of fortune in *Il Principe* (1532), Fortune continually reappeared in literature and history from antiquity to the Renaissance.<sup>54</sup> In short, while Fortune and its related concepts possess an interesting relationship to time, it would be impossible to do justice to this topic by referring to all of the necessary sources and influences while managing to incorporate it convincingly into a thesis on time. While Fortune and related concepts such as hazard possess clear links to time, they have already received ample attention from scholars - instead I will explore other time-related concepts that have not been studied as widely, such as customary law and second nature.

### *Definition of Terms*

It will now be necessary to explain what my own approach to time has been and how I have defined it in the works of Montaigne and Bruno. I explore time in this thesis through the doctrine of temporal experience.<sup>55</sup> In other words, I approach time in the source material with a particular focus on the direct, sensory human understanding of time. This includes the manner in which time becomes apparent to Montaigne and Bruno through direct physical changes to themselves such as ageing, as well as the perception of time that stems from their observation of changes to the world around them, such as the seasons or weather. I avoid any attempt to define time in absolute terms and instead focus on how Montaigne and Bruno perceive time and their place within it.

In the *Essais*, an attempt to formulate one single definition of time would be impossible, since Montaigne prefers to focus on understanding concepts such as time through direct, applicable experience. As Marcel Conche has stated, on defining the exact

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<sup>53</sup> For an introduction to fortune in Bruno, see Michele Ciliberto, *La ruota del tempo* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1986), ‘Chapter IV - Angeli Nocentes’; on Montaigne and fortune see Alain Legros, ‘Montaigne entre Fortune et Providence’, in *Actes du cinquantenaire de la fondation du CESR et XLIXe Colloque International d’études Humanistes*, Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, Tours 3-9 July 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Flanagan, ‘The Concept of Fortuna in Machiavelli’, in *The Political Calculus: Essays on Machiavelli’s Philosophy*, ed. by Anthony Parel (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1972), pp. 127-156 (p. 135).

<sup>55</sup> Philosophers such as Edmund Husserl would articulate time perception and time consciousness in a more systematic way. For precursors to this way of thinking see Holly Andersen & Rick Grush, ‘A Brief History of Time-Consciousness: Historical Precursors to James and Husserl’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 47 (2009), pp. 277-307.

nature of time, ‘Montaigne repousse la question elle-même, comme étant de celles qui ne peuvent, par principe, conduire à rien de plus clair que mon savoir immédiat’.<sup>56</sup> Attempting to articulate a concrete definition of something as abstract as time only leads to endless unsatisfactory answers: ‘On échange un mot pour un autre mot, et souvent plus incogneu’ (III.XIII.1069). Montaigne concludes that the only solution to this seemingly limitless supply of definitions is to observe and record how he himself experiences time - his emotional reactions to it, his awareness of it, his sensory responses to it: ‘Je sçay mieux que c’est qu’homme que je ne sçay que c’est animal, ou mortel, ou raisonnable’ (III.XIII.1069).

Bruno’s initial awareness of time is motivated by the constant change, or *mutazione*, that he witnesses all around him. As he states in *De l’infinito, universo e mondi*, ‘tutto per infinito spacio scorrendo cangia il volto’ (*De l’infinito* II.26). Furthermore, his deliberate self-portrayal as a grandiose philosopher on the cusp of bringing the light of truth to civilisation - ‘per amor della vera sapienza e studio della vera contemplazione’ (*De l’infinito* II.10) - is heavily imbued with a sense of the future and the limit of his capabilities in time.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Bruno articulates a conception of time that fits into the wider cosmological theories he proposes, while also accounting for his actions in time.<sup>58</sup> As Nicola Badaloni has previously suggested, ‘il tempo, che tutto dà e tutto toglie, è il fato’, but it is also ‘una divisione definita come “mutazione”’.<sup>59</sup> Bruno witnesses the physical effects of time through mutation but is simultaneously aware of his status within the development of human civilisation.

When I refer to an approach that prioritises temporal experience, I am particularly interested in the dichotomy that arises between mental perceptions of time and physical effects of time. While some work has been carried out on this phenomenon in the *Essais*, I bring a more systematic approach to the question of mental and physical time. My central

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<sup>56</sup> Marcel Conche, *Temps et destin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), p. 24. Paul Mathias seemingly confirms this tendency in ‘Temps’ in *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: H. Champion, 2004): ‘Le temps constitue ainsi assurément le thème essentiel des Essais, parce qu’ils forment une série indéfinie de petites différenciations discursives - “un contrerolle de divers et muables accidens et d’imaginations irresoluës et, quand il y eschet, contraires”’ (p. 1121).

<sup>57</sup> For a concise summary of Bruno’s representation of his own status in the history of knowledge, see Sergius Kodera, ‘Timid Mathematicians vs. Daring Explorers of the Infinite Cosmos: Giordano Bruno, Literary Self-Fashioning and *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*’, in *The Making of Copernicus: Early Modern Transformations of the Scientist and his Science*, ed. by Wolfgang Neuber, Thomas Rahn & Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Kodera states that Bruno ‘claims to have liberated the human mind, which had been caught for centuries in the fetters of a finite, geocentric, and anthropocentric cosmology’ (p. 231).

<sup>58</sup> Maria Elena Severini, ‘Vicissitudine e tempo nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno’, in *La mente di Giordano Bruno*, ed. by F. Meroi (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2004), pp. 225-258 (p. 230).

<sup>59</sup> Badaloni, p. 15.

claim to originality lies in my conceptual - rather than methodological - approach which investigates 16th-century time through the lens of what I term 'embodied time'. For example, I demonstrate how issues arise from the understanding that an individual will die due to his or her degenerating body, but that the mind - which inhabits the body - offers them a degree of freedom from this process, to reflect on past, present and future time. Conche alludes to some of the historical debates surrounding this problem thus:

Plotin et saint Augustin ont très bien exprimé le contraste entre, d'une part, l'impression claire que, spontanément, l'on a du temps, ainsi que la facilité avec laquelle on use du mot "temps" si l'on ne s'interroge pas sur la chose, et, d'autre part, l'embarras dans lequel on tombe si l'on aborde le sujet de plus près et si on le soumet à un examen attentif.<sup>60</sup>

Plotinus and Augustine well understood the difference between our sensory awareness of time and the difficulties that arise from contemplating it at length; I hope to illustrate that this idea clearly filters into the works of Montaigne and Bruno. In Chapter One, I situate time between physical and mental responses to temporality. I believe that the ability to see the direct effects of time in the present moment, combined with a simultaneous awareness of the past, present and future, leads both thinkers to generate fascinating approaches to temporality that do not conform to 16th-century end-times such as the Last Judgement or the Final Age of Men. I have previously alluded to this process as a type of 'experimentation' with time. Their tendency to ignore or even deliberately subvert the temporal norms that previous scholars have attributed to the late 1500s frees both Montaigne and Bruno from an obligation towards upholding conventional ideas of temporality. I demonstrate that their experimentation lies in accepting and understanding the foundations of human existence in time - mortality, change, ageing - then attempting to manipulate them regardless. As a result, I reveal new approaches to temporality which do not align with the religious ideas of time that critics have previously attributed to the 1500s, such as Heaven and Hell or the soul's immortality. While such experiments do not represent the final word on time in the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues, both thinkers show that the traditional tenets associated with time can be manipulated.

My intellectual approach to time has been influenced in part by Ian Maclean's excellent analysis of Montaigne's response to the philosophical tradition in *Montaigne philosophe* (1997), as well as the discussion of time found in Michele Ciliberto's

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 25.



monograph *Giordano Bruno* (1990).<sup>61</sup> In both cases, Maclean and Ciliberto have not devoted studies specifically to time but their resulting research embraces many aspects of temporality in Montaigne and Bruno, as both scholars attempt to synthesise the philosophical strands of their subjects. In doing so they have separately uncovered some of the most fundamental points of comparison between Montaigne and Bruno. In particular, they both suggest an approach to temporality which acknowledges the difficulties that arise between a temporally finite body and a simultaneous consciousness of this finitude.

Indeed, both critics have alluded to the significance of the mind-body duality in various ways without examining primary source material in more detail. Ciliberto discusses the figure of the *furioso amante* in the *Eroici Furori* and emphasises that while human beings are aware of the small possibility of accessing divine knowledge (which exists in a state outside human comprehension), humankind is unable to transcend time because humans do not utilise time properly: 'l'uomo resterebbe rinchiuso nelle muraglie della mutazione'.<sup>62</sup> Through this epistemological dilemma, Ciliberto recognises Bruno's understanding that the human body is a finite entity, 'un limite oggettivo, corporeo. Ma, al tempo stesso, questo si configura come limite soggettivo, gnoseologico'.<sup>63</sup> Human cognitive powers present other possibilities not tied directly to the time of the body, such as thinking about the future and one day accessing divine knowledge. Maclean has also discussed Montaigne's act of self-study - a strategy present across many of his chapters but arguably culminating in 'De l'experience' (III.XII) - with reference to 'le problème du temps par rapport à l'être et à l'essence'.<sup>64</sup> While the self is always present in time, our minds are simultaneously thinking of other things - 'le moi-objet échappe au moi-sujet' - and our selves are constantly changing - 'le moi se recrée et se modifie'.<sup>65</sup> Both scholars have outlined the difficulties that emerge from such an understanding of time and how they affect the respective intellectual projects of Montaigne and Bruno. I build on the work of Ciliberto and Maclean by bringing the two thinkers together in a full-length study and exploring both bodies in time and mental perceptions of time in more detail. My conceptual originality emerges through an initial focus on the reality of time as it

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<sup>61</sup> Michele Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno* (Roma: Laterza, 1990).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>64</sup> Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, p. 79.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

presents itself to Montaigne and Bruno through bodily changes, human emotion, and other physical markers.

As I have previously stated, the 16th century was undoubtedly a period when Christianity was becoming fractured due to the Reformation and subsequent Counter-Reformation. While I argue that Montaigne and Bruno were exploring the question of time in new and exciting ways, they were writing alongside many theological ‘innovators’ who also touched on the issue of temporality. Therefore one must be particularly careful when discussing conceptions of ‘Christian time’ in the late 16th century.<sup>66</sup> Many vital matters of doctrine were being hotly debated by prominent theologians in the European Renaissance, from the sacraments and sainthood to the Papal office itself. Arguably the idea of salvation lay at the heart of these matters. Scholars such as Justin S. Holcomb and David A. Johnson have already emphasised this idea thus:

All of the diverse and contested points that so animated the age - justification, the sacraments, mediation, scripture, hierarchy, and even saints and sainthood - ultimately can be reduced to the question “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>67</sup>

As a result, the Reformers and Counter-Reformers were primarily concerned with practical ways to achieve salvation. The exact nature of time was an abstract concept that key thinkers such as Luther and John Calvin (1509-1564) were not wholly concerned with. Indeed, one of the only significant time-related changes to Christian time occurred when Protestants removed Purgatory from the Afterlife. Overall, most currents of Christianity (including Protestantism, Calvinism, and Reformed Catholicism) were still content to view God as the end of human time.<sup>68</sup> However, as I describe in further detail in the literature review below, a handful of scholars have already noted differences emerging in 16th-century theological conceptions of time. Therefore, when comparing the more abstract concepts of time in Montaigne and Bruno to Christian ideas of time, I will generally be referring to time in the broader Christian tradition. In general I allude to issues such as eschatology and end-time which were not as fiercely debated in the 16th

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<sup>66</sup> I include this delineation in spite of the fact that many 20th century scholars of time failed to adequately convey religious differences in the 16th century when discussing the significance of time during that period.

<sup>67</sup> Justin S. Holcomb & David A. Johnson, *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), p. 226.

<sup>68</sup> See William Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes. A Biblical and Historical Study on the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), p. 55 & pp. 314-315. Fudge states that - unlike Heaven and eternal salvation - Calvin wasn’t interested in describing Hell, while Luther was largely uninterested in thinking about what happens after we die.

century as the sainthood, sacraments or the indulgences. However, where appropriate I will make sure to highlight any divisions or debates between the various Christian denominations.

### *Literature Review*

Here I move from assessing general studies of 16th-century time towards more specific research concerning Montaigne and Bruno, before presenting the small amount of research that has already attempted to forge direct connections between the two thinkers. The purpose of this literature review will be to justify my use of Montaigne and Bruno; highlight the significance of this research and where exactly it will be filling a gap; assess the strengths and weaknesses of previous criticism about time in 16th century. This analysis will provide further evidence of my belief that previous scholarship has focused mainly on 'destructive' notions of time (such as apocalyptic ideas of the Last Judgement, old Father Time), whereas little criticism has assessed how and why well-known 16th-century thinkers such as Montaigne and Bruno were questioning or even ignoring such concerns altogether.

I have already stated the importance of Quinones and his contribution towards time in the 16th century, and in *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* he emphasises how individuals understood their existence in time compared to God's eternity. Quinones argues that the Renaissance is defined by a temporal paradox: 'man's greater desire is to savour the present wholeness and being that he has always conceived to be the properties of divinity. Of course, as long as man is involved in time this is impossible'.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, his illuminating Chapter Six devoted to time in Montaigne begins by asserting one of the key beliefs of this thesis; namely that Montaigne did not engage with many of the main currents of Renaissance temporal response.<sup>70</sup> However, unlike Quinones I avoid making direct connections between this difference on the part of Montaigne and the idea that it made him 'startlingly modern'.<sup>71</sup> I have also highlighted Barret as the most recent scholar to produce a study dedicated to exploring conceptions of

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<sup>69</sup> Quinones, p. 26. In doing so, Quinones finds a continuity from the Middle Ages which is denied by Belgian scholar Georges Poulet in his well-known study in *Études sur le temps humain I* (Paris: Plon et Éditions Du Rocher, 1952). Poulet inadvertently highlights the dangers of differentiating too carefully between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages by claiming that while Medieval society was aware of enduring in time (due to the Afterlife), a 16th-century Christian 'sentait [...] le caractère précaire et fugitif de chaque moment vécu' (p. 14).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

time in the Renaissance, while Cohen has assessed time and temporality from an art history perspective with her study from 2014. Again Cohen recognises that ‘the development of temporal conceptions and attitudes from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries was not uniform, consistent or progressive’.<sup>72</sup>

Cohen’s monograph forms part of a few recent additions to the field of time studies that have sought to explore particular aspects of Renaissance time. Michael Edwards’ *Time and Science of the Soul* (2013) is an excellent analysis of the perceived connections between time and the soul in early modern philosophy. Another contribution is J.J.A. Mooij’s *Time and Mind: the History of a Philosophical Problem* (2005) - while this study does not focus solely on the Renaissance, it is notable not only for its focus on time but also its approach, which traces philosophical and religious traditions concerning time and the mind. Mooij considers Aristotle, Plotinus, and Augustine to be the main proponents of time as dependent on consciousness, but argues that these issues ‘continued to dominate discussion in the Middle Ages and after’.<sup>73</sup> Max Engammare’s *L’ordre du temps* (2004) traces the Protestant obsession with punctuality in the latter half of the 16th century; he has also published *On Time, Punctuality and Discipline in Early Modern Calvinism* (2010); both texts have provided invaluable context and yet possess a rather narrow focus.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Neil Kenny has published extensively on 16th-century attitudes towards death, a topic which has naturally led to various reflections on time through the lens of mortality; his most recent monograph entitled *Death and Tenses* (2015) features a chapter on Montaigne and provides interesting context on attitudes towards death in the late 16th century.<sup>75</sup>

As well as these larger scale monographs, a handful of brief articles and book chapters must also be noted. Georges Matoré’s article ‘Le temps au XVIème siècle’ is only short but summarises some of the standard temporal concerns of the 16th century including ‘temps et esthétique’ and ‘chronologie’, as well as a brief section on memory

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<sup>72</sup> Cohen, p. 116.

<sup>73</sup> J.J.A. Mooij, *Time and Mind: the History of a Philosophical Problem*, trans. by P. Mason (Leiden: Brill 2005), p. 261.

<sup>74</sup> Max Engammare, *L’ordre du temps: l’invention de la ponctualité au XVIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2004); also by Engammare, see *On Time, Punctuality and Discipline in Early Modern Calvinism*, trans. by Karin Maag (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Neil Kenny, *Death and Tenses: Posthumous Presence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); also by Kenny, see ‘Je ne me réputerai totalement mourir’, in *Evocations of Eloquence: Rhetoric, Literature and Religion in Early Modern France: Essays in Honour of Peter Bayley*, ed. by Nicholas Hammond & Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 337–350; “Il ne faut pas être si exact en temps”: la mort au croisement de la fiction et de l’érudition humanistes’, in *Érudition et fiction: troisième rencontre internationale Paul-Zumthor*, ed. by É. Méchoulan (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), pp. 65–80.

and custom.<sup>76</sup> In the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century, further sporadic publications on time in the Renaissance continued to appear, with notable contributions by French scholar Yvonne Bellenger, who produced an edited collection of essays on time in the Middle Ages and Renaissance in the late 1980s, *Le Temps et la Durée dans la littérature au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance* (1986).<sup>77</sup> Julius Thomas Fraser included a brief section on 'The Renaissance' in his well-known study *Of Time, Passion and Knowledge: Reflections on the Strategy of Existence* (1990); Fraser focuses on the 'biologically oriented outlook on time' which he believes was perpetuated by anatomists such as Paracelsus (1493-1541).<sup>78</sup> However, by far the most recent collection of articles on time in the Renaissance is a special edition of the *Journal of Early Modern Studies* entitled 'A Time of Their Own: Experiencing Time and Temporality in the Early Modern World' (2017) edited by Alessandro Arcangeli and Anu Korhonen; the edition includes articles on time and historicity and female time-keeping routines, as well as an article by myself which constitutes a shortened version of some of the themes explored in Chapters One and Two of this thesis.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, as previously stated in 'Time in the 16th century?', a vast amount of present-day research has been devoted to exploring time in the Middle Ages - some of these studies have also alluded to early modern concerns as part of their remit.

It is also worth briefly acknowledging that recent studies have already begun to highlight the increasingly fractured nature of 16th century time. These divisions are most apparent when we consider chronology and time-keeping; Engammare's *On Time, Punctuality and Discipline* examines how Reformed Protestant circles were developing a new approach to individual time-keeping. Furthermore, in their respective monographs, Quinones and Cohen have both explored the idea that a more individualistic approach to time emerged in the Renaissance as a response to religious upheaval. This idea is echoed by Hill who describes a number of temporal concepts which revolved around the individual rather than the (Christian) collective; these include ideas which survived from Antiquity including the present as a decisive moment, the notion of *carpe diem* and the

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<sup>76</sup> Georges Matoré, 'Le temps au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *L'Information Grammaticale*, 32 (1987), pp. 3-8. See also Henry Hornik, 'Time and periodization in French Renaissance Literature: Rabelais and Montaigne', *Studi francesi*, 13.39 (1969), pp. 477-481.

<sup>77</sup> Yvonne Bellenger, ed., *Le Temps et la Durée dans la littérature au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance* (Paris: Nizet, 1986).

<sup>78</sup> Julius Thomas Fraser, *Of Time, Passion and Knowledge: Reflections on the Strategy of Existence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 30.

<sup>79</sup> Alessandro Arcangeli & Anu Korhonen, eds., 'A Time of Their Own: Experiencing Time and Temporality in the Early Modern World', *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 6.1 (2017); Rachel Ashcroft, '(Re)thinking time: Giordano Bruno and Michel de Montaigne', *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 6.1 (2017), pp. 157-181.

replacement of eternity with sempiternal secular duration through poetic fame and physical procreation. Finally, Sarah Hutton - who has also produced one of the few studies on Bruno and time - argues that while Aristotelian theories of time were dominant in the institutions, they often came under attack not only from Bruno, but also his fellow Italians such as Bernardino Telesio (1509-1588) and Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597).

It is surprising to note just how little research has been devoted to time in Montaigne, when the topic appears to permeate so many aspects of his writing. A necessary starting point is Françoise Joukovsky's *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (1972), which is still the only monograph devoted to studying time in the *Essais*.<sup>80</sup> Joukovsky compresses many different aspects of time in the *Essais* into her study, from Stoic definitions of the present moment to the importance of memory. She also investigates an idea that I explore further in Chapter Three concerning 'le problème de la connaissance' in the *Essais*, which Joukovsky describes as being 'posé sur les bases incertaines du temps'.<sup>81</sup> While her research is thorough and incorporates many different aspects of temporality found in Montaigne's work, her thesis relies heavily on an outdated current of scholarship in Montaigne studies which tends to classify the three books of the *Essais* into various modes of thought.<sup>82</sup> In response, I have rejected a systematic approach to defining time in each book in favour of a study which opens out layers of temporality across the *Essais* and acknowledges contradictions where necessary. This method of analysis has allowed me to dispense with the need to establish a rigid scholarly structure to the study (as in Joukovsky's work) and instead mirrors the flux and flow of Montaigne's often-contradictory thought.

Various chapters and articles have focused on exploring particular aspects of time in Montaigne; for example, both Yvonne Bellenger and Marie-Madeleine de La Garandière discuss representations of ageing in the *Essais*.<sup>83</sup> Richard A. Sayce has explored an element of time incorporated by many respected Montaigne scholars not writing on time, namely the 'peinture du passage' or Montaigne's unique ability to 'write' himself

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<sup>80</sup> Françoise Joukovsky, *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (Paris: Nizet, 1972).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>82</sup> See Pierre Villey, *Les sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne* (New York: B. Franklin, 1968).

<sup>83</sup> Yvonne Bellenger, 'Le thème de la vieillesse dans le livre III des *Essais*' in *Des signes au sens: lectures du livre III des Essais*, ed. by Françoise Argod-Dutard (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), pp. 201-215; Marie-Madeleine de La Garandière, 'La méditation philosophique sur le temps au XVIème siècle: Budé, Montaigne' in *Le Temps et la Durée dans la littérature au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance*, ed. by Yvonne Bellenger (Paris: Nizet, 1986), pp. 193-209. Further articles on specific aspects of time in Montaigne include Odette De Mourgues, 'Passé, présent, futur dans les Essais', in *Montaigne in Cambridge: Proceedings of the Cambridge Montaigne Colloquium*, Cambridge University 7-8 April 1998; Jonathan Kim-Reuter, 'Transcendence Unbound: Existence and Temporality in Montaigne's *Essays*' in *Temporality in Life as Seen Through Literature*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), pp. 223-232.

over time.<sup>84</sup> I also include here Albert Ahmeti's study *De la peinture du temps dans les 'Essais' de Montaigne* (2014) as an example of a more recent study on time in Montaigne, with the caveat that this is a self-published thesis.<sup>85</sup> However, Ahmeti's bibliography includes a worthy selection of texts on Montaigne and time - including many of the articles and chapters highlighted above - and argues primarily against the ideas that Joukovsky originally put forward. He takes issue with her notion that the conclusion of time in the *Essais* is a 'seizing' of the present moment. Rather, temporal mutation lies at the heart of time in the *Essais*: 'L'auteur échappe continuellement au présent car chez lui la constance (par laquelle l'instant peut être saisi) s'avère impossible'.<sup>86</sup> Other recent studies include an article by Antoine Compagnon on the nature of the present in Montaigne's work, while Daniel Ménager has assessed 'la question du commencement' in the *Essais*.<sup>87</sup> I hope to cover new ground by exploring Montaigne's experiments with the philosophical significance of suicide and fear of death while setting him firmly within the context of a writer purposely breaking free of the temporal conventions of the late 16th century.

For various reasons, there is less Bruno scholarship to draw on than the range of criticism consistently being published on Montaigne. However, while this means that there is also less research available on time in Bruno, some highly significant studies have recently been published. Most modern scholars have approached time in Bruno through the concept of vicissitude. Echoing the idea of temporal mutation in the *Essais*, Elena Maria Severini and Badaloni have both begun to explore time in Bruno's works through the related concepts of *mutazione* and *vicissitudine*. Furthermore, Enrico Giannetto and Hutton have discussed aspects of physical time in Bruno's works, focusing on both his response to Aristotelianism and also how Bruno may have pre-empted the temporal theories of scientists such as Henri Poincaré (1854-1912) and Albert Einstein (1879-1955).<sup>88</sup> Hutton's brief but important article also includes a comparative angle, which assesses Bruno alongside his Italian contemporaries such as Telesio. While there are still no full-

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<sup>84</sup> Richard A. Sayce, 'Montaigne et la peinture du passage', *Saggi e ricerche di letteratura francese*, vol. 4 (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1963), pp. 11-59; see also Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

<sup>85</sup> Albert Ahmeti, *De la peinture du temps dans les 'Essais' de Montaigne* (Paris: Books On Demand, 2014).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., '2. Le temps en va-et-vient ou le va-et-vient du temps'.

<sup>87</sup> Antoine Compagnon, 'L'écriture de l'instant dans les "Essais"', *Montaigne. 1588-1998, Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 5 (1998), pp. 1-20; Daniel Ménager, 'Montaigne et la question du commencement', *Bulletin de la société des amis de Montaigne*, 29-30 (2003), pp. 11-21.

<sup>88</sup> Enrico Giannetto, 'Giordano Bruno and the Relativity of Time', in *Turning Traditions Upside Down: Rethinking Giordano Bruno's Enlightenment*, ed. by Henning Hufnagel & Anne Eusterschulte (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 121-130.

length monographs devoted to time in Bruno, Paul-Henri Michel's *La cosmologie de Giordano Bruno* (1962) touches on various aspects of temporality across the full breadth of Bruno's works, including similar ideas to Ciliberto surrounding time, nature and truth.<sup>89</sup> I build on this research by revealing further aspects of time across the entirety of the Italian dialogues, countering Granada's belief that there is little worthwhile evidence on time in the six texts. Instead, this thesis shares the view of Badaloni that time is a central component of the dialogues from the *Cena* onwards.

In recent years, a small number of critics have attempted to establish significant biographical and intellectual connections between Bruno and Montaigne. Bruno, born in Nola (near Naples) in 1548, spent around two years (1579-1581) living in Toulouse, a city that Jordi Bayod has argued the Frenchman was well-acquainted with.<sup>90</sup> The two men were also resident in Paris in 1582, where Bruno was staying at the same time Montaigne, then mayor of Bordeaux, arrived at court regarding diplomatic matters.<sup>91</sup> Critics have also analysed the link with John Florio, an Italian-English scholar and good friend of Bruno, who produced the first translation of Montaigne's *Essais* into English in 1603.<sup>92</sup> Considering all of these possible points of connection, one would assume that at least one major study would already have been published with the aim of establishing further crossover in their works.<sup>93</sup> However, no such large-scale study exists to date.

One possible explanation for this hesitation may be the relative complexity that arises from comparing two thinkers who lack any truly significant historical evidence to connect them. Furthermore, their initial purposes in writing appear to be very different. Bruno's Italian dialogues are an excellent example of the thematic and stylistic scope that Bruno experimented with; he attempts a philosophical project that encompasses detailed

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<sup>89</sup> Paul-Henri Michel, *La cosmologie de Giordano Bruno* (Paris: Hermann, 1962).

<sup>90</sup> See Jordi Bayod, 'Bruno lector de Montaigne. Ecos de los "Ensayos" en el primer dialogo de "La cena de las cenizas"', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 10 (2004), pp. 11-26. Bayod notes that 'between September 1579 and the summer of 1581, Bruno lived in Toulouse, a city well-known to Montaigne' (pp. 11-12). All translations of Bayod's work are my own.

<sup>91</sup> See Donald Frame, *Montaigne. Une vie, une oeuvre, 1533-1592*, trans. by J.C. Arnould, N. Dauvois & P. Eichel (Paris: H. Champion, 1994), p. 248.

<sup>92</sup> For more on the Florio connection see Frances Yates, *John Florio: the Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 89. Some critics have even discussed a link between Montaigne, Bruno and Shakespeare (who read at least some parts of Florio's translation of the *Essais*), although this connection is tenuous. Gatti states in *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge: Giordano Bruno in England* (London: Routledge, 1989): 'Beyersdorff concludes that he [Shakespeare] is more likely to have been influenced by other literary works such as Montaigne's *Essays* (1580), Florio's English translation (1603) or Lyly's *Anatomy of Wit* than by a philosopher like Bruno. He points out that it is doubtful if Shakespeare ever met Bruno, and that anyway they moved in different and at times rival circles, Bruno being linked to Sidney as a patron and Shakespeare to Southampton' (p. 173).

<sup>93</sup> 'And during his stay in London, between the spring of 1583 and October 1585, he lived in the residence of the French ambassador Michel de Castelnau, who was known as a *politique*, with views not too dissimilar to Montaigne regarding the political and religious conflicts in France at that time [...]' (Bayod, p. 12).



discussion of cosmology, natural philosophy, ethics and more.<sup>94</sup> These works are unlike most other 16th-century texts since they are firmly rooted in Bruno's theory on the infinite universe. Furthermore, he experiments with the traditional philosophical dialogue, often including elements of satire and comedy in his work in an attempt to incorporate traditional strands of philosophy such as ethics into his unique cosmology. The *Essais* are altogether different in genre. This series of *essais* or 'attempts' comprise three books which cover a wealth of topics from child-rearing to suicide. In each chapter, Montaigne attempts to convey the flow of his thoughts as they enter his mind and express them through writing.<sup>95</sup> The word *essai* had never been used to express an intellectual or literary project in the French language of the 16th century; *l'essai* represented the origins of an entirely new literary genre altogether.<sup>96</sup> Clearly, Bruno and Montaigne engaged with philosophy in different ways to their contemporaries, perhaps helping to explain why no major works have appeared that directly compare the two thinkers.

It is the radical nature of these thinkers that my thesis will embrace using an approach which justifies the comparison of Montaigne and Bruno by considering them as thinkers who defied classification and whose interests overlapped. In this sense, both thinkers converge due to their willingness to move between and even challenge established literary and philosophical norms. On the one hand, Bruno appears to be a natural philosopher interested in literary form; across the breadth of his works he employs multiple genres comprising poems, philosophical dialogues and satire, as well as switching to vernacular in the Italian dialogues. On the other hand, Montaigne is a literary innovator who combines his unique style with extensive knowledge of and interest in the schools of classical philosophy, including a thorough understanding of Lucretius, Plato, and Socrates. In accepting this fluidity on the part of Montaigne and Bruno, this thesis has focused more on their respective originality and in doing so has actually revealed a series of fascinating similarities between the two thinkers.

Since the middle of the 20th century, various articles and book chapters have begun to highlight connections between Montaigne and Bruno in an effort to begin

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<sup>94</sup> Ordine states that: 'È qui che Bruno comincia ad abbozzare un percorso globale che dalla filosofia della natura (*Cena, De la causa e Infinito*), passando per la filosofia morale (*Spaccio e Cabala*), approda alla filosofia contemplativa (*Furori*)' (p. 13).

<sup>95</sup> See Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonin, 'Un homme, un livre' in Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007): 'Il s'agit de fixer, pour les conserver et les observer ensuite, des pensées informes, fugaces dans leurs mouvements incontrôlés, bref le flux du monologue intérieur que Montaigne appellera fantaisies, imaginations ou cogitations' (p. xii).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. xiv. 'La seconde audace fut l'invention d'une méthode et, partant, d'un nouveau genre littéraire, l'essai. D'entrée, dès leur titre inouï en français, *Les Essais* affichent, et excusent, l'incompétence de l'apprenti, les imperfections et les bizarreries éventuelles' (p. xiv).

analysing the two thinkers. While Montaigne critics have remained indifferent to Bruno, several Bruno scholars have taken the initiative, beginning with Fulvio Papi's *Antropologia e civiltà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (1968).<sup>97</sup> Many of the themes discussed by later critics - such as Eric MacPhail and Bayod - take Papi's text as their primary influence. Chapter Seven, 'La civiltà come dignità dell'uomo', is of particular interest. Here Papi identifies a veiled reference to Montaigne in Bruno's satirical work *Spaccio della bestia trionfante* (1584); Montaigne is the *personaggio pazzo* or 'crazy person' being referred to when Jupiter is addressing *Otium*, complaining that some do not realise there is 'differenza molta tra il non esser vizioso e l'esser virtuoso'.<sup>98</sup> Papi considers this a direct attack on Montaigne's essay, 'Des Cannibales' (I.XXXI), and its favourable portrayal of New World tribes and their supposedly 'virtuous' lifestyle. Papi then identifies a key pattern which will later be confirmed by other scholars working on Montaigne and Bruno - namely their tendency to reach entirely different conclusions, having identified the same problem at hand.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Papi argues that for the first time in the history of Western thought, two different positions are established here. One argues that while nature should be a primary point of influence, society must act towards transforming itself 'come armonizzazione e temperamento delle esigenze naturali'; the other believes that New World society is already a beacon of virtue with its simple, tribal existence, while Europe has corrupted itself beyond recognition with bloody civil wars.<sup>100</sup> Papi is one of the first critics to acknowledge the difficulties that arise between interpreting the two thinkers, while simultaneously highlighting the potential value of a comparison between the two.

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<sup>97</sup> Fulvio Papi, *Antropologia e civiltà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), p. 346. See also M.A. Granada, *La reivindicación de la filosofía en Giordano Bruno* (Barcelona: Herder, 2005). Granada briefly mentions parallels with Montaigne concerning their shared interest in philosophy and its translation into the practical morality that was embodied by Socrates: 'It is true that at the same time Bruno reiterated this principle, Montaigne was questioning it in the *Essais*, and specifically the opening pages of the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' (p. 215). Translation own. Nicola Panichi's monograph *I vincoli del disinganno: per una nuova interpretazione di Montaigne* (Florence: Olschki, 2004) attempts a more wide-ranging comparison between the two writers. In Chapter Three 'Le età della storia', Panichi identifies history as one of the main connections in the *Essais* - 'il vero intertesto di tutti i saggi' (p. 67). She claims that Montaigne defines historical time in terms of repeating cycles, and subsequently compares this cyclical concept of history with Bruno's *vicissitudine* (pp. 88-89).

<sup>98</sup> Papi, p. 346; see also Ordine, pp. 90-120 and Brian Vickers, 'Leisure and Idleness in the Renaissance: the Ambivalence of otium', *Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1990), pp. 1-37, for a useful survey of the classical influences of the *Otium* vs. *Negotium* debate: 'Throughout this tradition human worth was evaluated in terms of the degree, and success of one's involvement in society, for the public good' (p. 2).

<sup>99</sup> In *Umbra profunda: studi su Giordano Bruno* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1999), Michele Ciliberto echoes this sentiment, stating that although they often move from a common issue, 'presentino due soluzioni radicalmente differenti' (p. 193).

<sup>100</sup> Papi, p. 351. Papi discusses Montaigne's relativism and the notion of the 'good native': 'La patologia della civiltà europea sta per far nascere il mito del buon selvaggio naturalmente morale, e, per questo, immediatamente felice' (p. 350).

Perhaps the most promising recent works that have sought to compare Montaigne and Bruno are a series of brief articles by Bayod, and a study by MacPhail. Bayod aims to uncover a textual link between the two authors in light of the contextual evidence that unites them. He discusses the cosmological implications of Copernicus found in a passage of Montaigne's well-known sceptical exercise the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* (II, XII) and revisits Papi's discussion, supporting it with textual evidence from other Bruno works. MacPhail begins from a slightly different premise, stating that in order to understand these 'two complex figures' he has chosen to work from a basis of anthropocentrifugalism, 'the radical alternative to anthropocentrism'.<sup>101</sup> Despite differing approaches, both critics identify common ground between Montaigne and Bruno that has previously gone unstudied - namely the importance of their views about human beings and nature. MacPhail believes that both thinkers 'subordinate and ultimately [...] negate the importance of humanity and human history in the scope of the cosmos'.<sup>102</sup> Bayod agrees that despite their differences of opinion regarding objective truth and scepticism, 'it seems the two come together through the idea of the homogeneity of nature and particularly with respect to all forms of life'.<sup>103</sup> I hope to uncover further connections between the two thinkers using a highly different approach to Bayod and MacPhail. Instead of referring back to Papi's earlier thesis, I build on research revolving around inner and outer time in order to explore the similarities and differences between Montaigne's and Bruno's responses to time.

### *Summary of Thesis Structure*

In Chapter One, 'Bodies in Time', I approach time through one of the most visible physical markers of temporal passage - bodies in time. I believe that 'bodies' - i.e. corruptible bodies from the human body to plants, trees, and mountains - inform initial responses to time in the works of Montaigne and Bruno. First I examine some of the most significant 16th-century conceptions of time familiar to Montaigne and Bruno, as well as exploring their respective literary aims in more detail and suggesting how contextual

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<sup>101</sup> MacPhail, p. 532. 'To enlarge on this recent trend and to reorient the prevailing view of Bruno's reaction to Montaigne, I want to propose a new basis of comparison between two figures who were, in terms of their publishing career, exact contemporaries. This basis I will call anthropocentrifugalism [...]. Both authors concur in their tendency to subordinate and ultimately to negate the importance of humanity and human history in the scope of the cosmos' (p. 531).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 532.

<sup>103</sup> Bayod, p. 206.

factors may have influenced a degree of indifference toward temporal conventions. I then explore 'bodies in time' in both the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues through textual analysis of themes such as death, war, substance, and matter which serve to highlight what I term the 'natural order' of bodies in time. Time emerges as a seemingly uncontrollable force, an exterior concept that acts upon bodies. However, I then move towards a more human-oriented response to time and introduce the first layer of complexity into the discussion through the idea of time-consciousness. The last section of Chapter One aligns the two thinkers more closely together by highlighting a shared awareness of what is truly at stake in the human temporal condition.

Chapter Two builds on these ideas by introducing how Montaigne and Bruno use human time-consciousness to experiment with different conceptions of time. As stated above, I have chosen a deliberate focus on future time and the notions of suicide, fear of death and afterlife. What emerges from this discussion is an experimentation with time that challenges deeply religious notions of time. Both Montaigne's account of his own near-death experience and Bruno's radical cosmology are responsible for dramatically subverting traditional responses to mortality. Such discussions reveal a willingness to challenge the seemingly rigid nature of time, an attitude which is not reflected in general scholarship on 16th-century time.

In Chapter Three, I take these ideas further by focusing on the interplay between eternity and time in the works of Montaigne and Bruno. I set the discussion in context by explaining the historical relationship between time and eternity and its status in the late 1500s. I highlight the tendency of both thinkers to experiment with strict notions of time and argue that they also treat eternity in an extremely unconventional manner. Montaigne and Bruno then appear to unite in their belief that human beings and the world around them exist in a state of temporal flux. I then use the last section of this chapter to explore how Montaigne and Bruno believe individuals should utilise time. This discussion reveals a deeply complicated relationship between time and epistemology that once again necessitates a very different approach to the future.

Chapter Four explores how their conceptions of time influence other aspects of their thought; in this case, I will assess the notion of custom and shed light on intriguing direct connections between Montaigne and Bruno that were previously ignored. Custom and time possess a fascinating relationship that both thinkers characterise in remarkably similar ways. Furthermore, their depiction of custom holds severe repercussions for the productive use of time discussed in the previous chapter.

## Chapter One: Bodies in Time

This chapter explores how Montaigne and Bruno understand time through the notion of ‘bodies in time’. Admittedly, in the 16th century, this conceptual term did not exist within intellectual thought. It is certainly true that thinkers and artists had begun to represent bodies - particularly the human body - in new and intriguing ways, but these approaches chiefly sought to attribute order or symmetry to corporeal substance. The German painter and printmaker Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) published a series of texts that attempted to apply detailed mathematical and scientific research on the human anatomy to aesthetics. His most famous collection of works, *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion* (1528) contained over 100 anthropometric woodcuts and was widely circulated in Europe. The French printer and author Geofroy Tory (1480-1533) produced a well-known philological work, *Champfleury* (1529), which contained several diagrams combining Roman capital letters with human bodies and faces in order to highlight their matching proportions.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the famous Belgian physician Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) transformed the study of human anatomy with his text *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (1543), which presented the physical structure of the human body in extensive and meticulous detail. Arguably such trends in philology, art and anatomy were all approaching the human figure in a way that emphasised the universal proportions of the human body and wished to systematise them further. However, alongside these developments, there were little to no currents of thought in 16th-century Europe which focused exclusively on the temporality of the body, a theme which - as I suggest in this chapter - emphasises the inconsistencies and changes inherent within human beings. Since neither thinker wholeheartedly engages with the popular ‘bodily’ trends identified above, ‘bodies in time’ is an original concept used here to provide a helpful framework for exploring time in this thesis.

In this chapter, ‘bodies’ refer to any body that is composed of a corruptible substance i.e., it is capable of undergoing a change to its current state. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, thinkers have often begun to think about time through observing changes both to themselves and their surroundings, i.e., the alternation of day and night, the seasons and the motions of the heavens. Such observations have provided the starting point for many prominent definitions of time within the history of

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<sup>1</sup> Tory’s diagrams were not unlike Leonardo da Vinci’s famous Vitruvian Man. See Barbara C. Bowen, ‘Geofroy Tory’s “Champ Fleury” and Its Major Sources’, *Studies in Philology*, 76.1 (1979), pp. 13-27.

philosophy on time, from Aristotle's belief that time cannot exist without change, to David Hume's assertion that the idea of time arises when we perceive a sequence of impressions. In the late 16th century, Bernardino Telesio (1509-1588) stated that the succession of things that humans perceive in the world around them is a perfectly natural place to begin discussing time since it is this succession that alerts us to the idea that a time in kind has 'passed'.<sup>2</sup> As we will see, Montaigne was particularly (but not exclusively) fascinated with the microcosm of his own body over time, while Bruno sought to explain time through radical theories concerning the substance and form of mutable bodies. Human beings sense the passage of time occurring and they can note the duration of different events. This experience of time is partly 'informed by the body' and its constant inner changes, such as physiological functions and transitions in mood or emotion.<sup>3</sup> Arguably it is also informed by the physical succession of external bodies, and thus it is through an analysis of changes to bodies, from the human body through to theories of matter more generally, that this thesis analyses how Montaigne and Bruno develop their understanding of time.

## Context

### *Definitions of time in the 16th century*

In the Introduction, I suggested that the complex range of attitudes towards time in the 16th century may not yet have been fully explored. However, it is still important to be able to establish a general picture of how most thinkers would have defined time during this period, particularly as I propose that Montaigne and Bruno often understood time differently to their contemporaries. Consequently, this section will briefly outline the influence of Aristotle's definition of time on 16th-century Scholastic education within the universities and other establishments, including the limited adoption of variations on this theme during the Renaissance (particularly those definitions by well-known critics of the Stagirite such as Proclus and Plotinus). Aristotle's philosophy underpinned the specific workings of Christian-Scholastic conceptions of time and was easily modified by

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Hutton, 'Some Renaissance critiques of Aristotle's theory of time: Telesio, Bruno, Patrizi', *Annals of Science*, 34 (1977), pp. 345-363 (p. 354). See also Marcel Conche, 'Temps, temporalité, temporalisation', *L'enseignement philosophique*, 6 (2009), pp. 9-20; Conche describes Hume's approach to time as the 'méthode qui consiste à partir de l'expérience' (p. 10).

<sup>3</sup> Marc Wittmann, 'Embodied Time: The Experience of Time, the Body, and the Self' in *The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Temporality*, ed. by Valtteri Arstila & Dan Lloyd (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 507-523 (p. 511). Wittmann focuses more on the self and the individual body as an entity that informs our experience of time, whereas I assess the role of external bodies too.

commentators to fit a finite cosmos within a linear historical timeline. I will also outline how Bruno engages with Aristotle's definition of time in the *Acrotismus Camoeracensis* (1588). While Montaigne makes over 80 references to Aristotle, 'le Dieu de la science scholastique' (II.XII.539), in the *Essais* he does not discuss Aristotle's definition of time at all, perhaps a notable omission in itself considering that the term *temps* appears over 500 times.<sup>4</sup> Bruno's response to Aristotle is much more sustained and must, therefore, be acknowledged within any discussion of late 16th-century definitions of time.

The small quantity of modern scholarship on 16th-century philosophy of time often identifies Aristotle's definition in the *Physics* as being the most widely-accepted response to the question 'what is time?', particularly amongst the various scholarly and religious establishments of the period.<sup>5</sup> Tamar Rudavsky has stated that Aristotle's connection between time and motion continually reappears in medieval and early modern philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Michael Edwards claims that philosophical discussions of time in the late 1500s and early 1600s nearly always began with Aristotle.<sup>7</sup> Aristotle had defined time as the number of change in respect of before and after. In other words, time is a measure of motion, and thus - far from being independent of motion in any way - time can only exist where motion does too. As Granada has stated in a comprehensive survey of sources related to time and eternity in Bruno, it appears that Aristotle reduces time to a mere accident of movement:

Time is thus an accident present in the corporeal substance due to the fact that essentially defines this substance: movement. And in this mobile substance time is

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<sup>4</sup> A brief remark towards the end of the *Apologie* comes close to Aristotle's definition without naming it as such: 'Autant en advient-il à la nature qui est mesurée, comme au temps qui la mesure' (II.XII.603). The extent to which Montaigne was influenced by Aristotle has often been dismissed by scholars of Montaigne, but Ann Hartle has recently argued that Aristotelianism lies at the heart of the *Essais*. For a literature review and subsequent response to this issue, see Ann Hartle, 'Chapter One: Reversing Aristotle' in *Montaigne and the Origins of Modern Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), pp. 5-28. Edilia Traverso's thorough account of Montaigne's borrowings from Aristotle is still useful; see Edilia Traverso, *Montaigne e Aristotele* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> This section will draw particularly on Hutton, 'Some Renaissance critiques...' and Miguel A. Granada, 'El concepto de tiempo en Bruno: tiempos cósmicos y eternidad', in *La filosofia di Giordano Bruno: Problemi ermeneutici e storiografici*, ed. by Eugenio Canone (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2003), pp. 85-113. For more on the 16th century and Aristotelian conceptions of time, see Michael Edwards, *Time and Science of the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith and Time* (Buffalo, N.Y.: McGill-Queen's University, 1997), pp. 69-77; Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 'Chapter 1 - The Setting'.

<sup>6</sup> Tamar Rudavsky, *Time Matters: Time, Creation and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, p. 15. Edwards goes on to provide an excellent account of Aristotle's connection between time and the soul, and its subsequent reception in the late 16th century. See pp. 15-18 for further background to this discussion in the *Physics*.

present in two forms, consistent with the two classes of mobile substance that exist.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Physics*, Aristotle defines two types of movement; therefore there are two types of time. One exists in sublunar beings which are both corruptible and created (the 'bodies' referred to in the chapter title); therefore time in the sublunar world is finite. The other type of time is infinite, as it measures the existence of celestial beings which are incorruptible and are not created.<sup>9</sup> Time is a measure of the motions generated by these types of beings; thus the existence of time depends wholly on the occurrence of motion. Furthermore, Aristotle undermines the importance of the present moment within the traditional temporal distinctions of past, present, and future; time is primarily evidenced by the transformation of the future into the past, as confirmed solely by an object in motion.<sup>10</sup>

Within the history of philosophy on time, Aristotle's definition is influential but is not without its flaws. Indeed, several critics have already identified problems inherent in this definition of time. Richard Sorabji argues that in the *Physics*, Aristotle provided an enticing set of paradoxes on time that has influenced Western philosophy for centuries; yet Aristotle himself failed to answer them satisfactorily and '[as] a result his solutions [...] tend to be less interesting than those of many of his successors'.<sup>11</sup> In particular, time anchors itself to motion so completely that Aristotle struggles to explain why time continues in the absence of motion.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the reception of Aristotle's definition of time in 16th-century Europe is not entirely straightforward. These issues certainly did not go unnoticed in the Renaissance, and Bruno was amongst a small number of Italian thinkers in the 16th century who attacked this definition of time outright.

Furthermore, Aristotle's belief in the eternity of time in both directions clashed directly with Christian doctrine. The only instance in the *Essais* in which Montaigne explicitly discusses Aristotle and temporality involves his brief remark that - according to

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<sup>8</sup> Granada, p. 482.

<sup>9</sup> Christianity will later be forced to adapt such elements of Aristotle's work, since according to Genesis, the celestial beings are incorruptible but are technically created: 'He [God] also made the stars' (Genesis 1.16). See Granada (ibid., p. 497) for a further discussion of the third kind of time - angelic time - represented by *aevum*. See also Edwards, *Time and Science of the Soul*: 'Time is the measure of things that have a beginning and an end; *Aevum* is the measure of things that have a beginning that lack an end; Eternity is called the measure of things that have neither beginning nor end' (p. 16).

<sup>10</sup> Hutton states that in Aristotelian time 'the present has no dimension, being merely the mark of transition of the future into past' (p. 346).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Hutton, p. 347.



Aristotle and Cicero - 'la naissance du monde est indéterminée' (II.XII.572). As John Spencer Hill has argued, Aristotle's theories only gained real traction in Europe from the 12th century onwards, when his texts 'made their way from Arab Spain to Christian France' and had to be adapted to more than one thousand years of Christian belief in the cosmology of Genesis.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the Bible presents a clear delineation of a beginning (the Creation in seven days) and an end (the Second Coming) to the Earth and thus to time, Aristotle argued for the eternity of the world - there can be nothing before nature since there can be nothing 'before' what is eternal.<sup>14</sup>

However, despite the obvious differences between these ideas of time, Aristotle's theories survived from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance owing to their malleable nature; a long tradition of commentaries conveniently modified his texts to reflect contemporary interests, and his definition of time was no exception. The writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Albertus Magnus (1200-1280) firmly cemented Aristotle as the figurehead of Scholastic teaching in the Middle Ages, and arguably Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Hobbes and John Donne (1572-1631) are notable thinkers from the 16th and early 17th centuries who continued to express time in distinctly Aristotelian terms.<sup>15</sup> Aristotelianism was unquestionably the foundation of Scholastic teaching in the late 16th century, a mainstay of education in the universities that Bruno would inevitably be forced to confront after receiving such an education himself.

However, Aristotle was not the sole classical authority available to philosophers and theologians during the early modern period. Already in the late 15th century, some of the greatest thinkers of the Italian Renaissance, including Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), had turned to the variations on Aristotle's definition of time put forward by the ancient philosopher Plotinus (204 AD-270 AD), who had criticised the Stagirite in the *Enneads*. Instead, both Plotinus and the Neoplatonic thinker Proclus (412 AD-485 AD) developed Plato's theory of time as a moving image of eternity.<sup>16</sup> Plotinus argued that time is not movement, nor is it a measure of movement; this is because 'movement is no more than something that occurs *in* time:

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<sup>13</sup> Hill, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Cuffe (1538-1601) was amongst those Christian theologians who attacked Aristotle for posing the eternity of time. For more on this debate see Marcel Conche, 'Temps, temporalité, temporalisation', p. 9 and Hutton, pp. 347-348.

<sup>15</sup> See Hutton, p. 348.

<sup>16</sup> See also Granada, pp. 485-488 for a discussion of Plotinus and Proclus which includes a special emphasis on their understanding of infinite time and eternity. For an excellent translation of Plato's *Timaeus* see Plato, *Complete Works*, trans. and ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), p. 1241.

“movement can stop altogether or be interrupted, but time cannot”.<sup>17</sup> Plotinus’ resulting definition of time as a ‘power of the soul’ - and the philosophical tradition that derived from it - will be explored in more detail towards the end of this chapter.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, one must acknowledge that it was thanks in large part to the Latin translations of Plotinus published by Ficino in 1492, as well as various comments on Proclus in his Platonic commentaries, that these philosophers were gradually introduced into Western thought from the 15th century onwards.

As well as the influence of classical philosophers working outside the Peripatetic school, Hutton has suggested in an early work on Bruno and time that Telesio and Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597) were part of a handful of 16th-century thinkers who actively responded to the more ‘mainstream’ Aristotelian definition of time with a notable degree of criticism.<sup>19</sup> Telesio conceived of time as completely separate from motion, while Patrizi severely condemned Aristotle’s teachings on time before ultimately deciding to adopt the Stagirite’s philosophy.<sup>20</sup> Petrus Ramus (1515-1572) was a French humanist and Protestant convert who was slaughtered in the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre; he was also an outspoken critic of Scholasticism who claimed that Aristotle had merely talked about the measurement of time, not time itself. In the late 1500s, Bruno joined this group and engaged directly with Aristotle’s idea of time as a number of motion in the *Acrotismus Camoeracensis*, his treatise that systematically attacked each key tenet of Aristotle’s philosophy in the *Physics*.<sup>21</sup> This work has naturally received considerable attention by the small number of critics who have already addressed time in Bruno’s work, and there is little need to go beyond the earlier studies of Hutton, Granada, and others in this respect.<sup>22</sup> Articles 38 to 40 and 43 to 44 of the *Acrotismus* all engage with aspects of time;

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<sup>17</sup> Hill, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> See also Edwards, *Time and Science of the Soul*, ‘Introduction’ in which he lists Telesio and Patrizi as thinkers who pre-empted Newtonian absolute time in the late 16th century.

<sup>20</sup> ‘In Telesio’s view it does not follow that because perception of time depends upon motion, the very existence of time does too. Instead, he says that time and motion are quite separate, and that time is prior to motion’ (Hill, p. 355).

<sup>21</sup> I will be translating extracts from the following edition: Giordano Bruno, *Acrotismus Camoeracensis*, ed. by F. Fiorentino (Naples: Dom. Morano, 1879). Publication of the original *Acrotismus Camoeracensis* followed Bruno’s infamous dispute at the Collège de Cambrai in Paris; for further information surrounding this particular event see Giordano Bruno, *Acrotismo cameracense. Le spiegazioni degli articoli di fisica contro i Peripatetici*, trans. and ed. by Barbara Amato, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 7 (Pisa: Serra, 2009), pp. 11-34.

<sup>22</sup> See also Enrico Giannetto, ‘Giordano Bruno and the Relativity of Time’, in *Turning Traditions Upside Down: Rethinking Giordano Bruno’s Enlightenment*, ed. by Henning Hufnagel & Anne Eusterschulte (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 121-130.

article 39 in particular directly responds to the definition of time as a number of motion thus:

Rather it is movement which measures time, and not time which measures movement. In fact, it is better to say that we understand duration through motion and not vice versa, because even though it appears that each one measures the other, a certain point in time will never be a measure of movement, if before that a particular movement has not already been a measure of time.<sup>23</sup>

As part of his reaction to Aristotle, here Bruno concludes that rather than time being a measure of movement, ‘time is a species of duration’; the two concepts of time and duration merge in so far as there are two types of duration - finite and infinite - and these correspond to time and eternity respectively. Time is the duration of individual things, whereas eternity is universal duration, ‘the collective name for time’.<sup>24</sup> Time measures the duration of corruptible substances while eternity measures the duration of non-corruptible substances. Bruno developed this theory on time a couple of years after the Italian dialogues were published, and it is defined as part of a systematic criticism of each article in the *Physics*; this thesis focuses on aspects of Bruno’s time in the earlier Italian dialogues, referencing his later works where appropriate.<sup>25</sup> In any case, it is clear that criticism of Aristotle and Scholasticism was not unheard of in the late 16th century, and many philosophers such as Bruno were actively reacting against such teachings.

### *Montaigne and Bruno*

As Joukovsky reminds her readers in *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (1972), there is no chapter in the *Essais* entitled ‘Du temps’, while Bruno scholars such as Hutton and Granada tend to dismiss the importance of the admittedly scattered references to *tempo* in the Italian dialogues.<sup>26</sup> However, I have already suggested that time is a key

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<sup>23</sup> Bruno, *Acrotismus Camoeracensis*, p. 147. Translation own. Original text: ‘Potius motus est mensura temporis, quam tempus mensura motus: verius enim per motum novimus durationem, quam e contra: quamvis enim haec mutuo se mensurari contingat, nunquam quoddam tempus mensura motus erit, ni prius quidam motus mensura temporis extiterit’. Furthermore, the original Latin title of Article 39 reads ‘Malo motum mensurare tempus; quam tempus motum’.

<sup>24</sup> Hutton, p. 356.

<sup>25</sup> See the Introduction, ‘Delineations and Limitations’ for further acknowledgment of the potential contradictions and changes inherent in both Bruno’s and Montaigne’s ideas of time, as well as selected relevant bibliography.

<sup>26</sup> Françoise Joukovsky, *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), p. 9. See also Hutton, p. 355; in ‘The Concept of Time in Giordano Bruno’ Granada claims that ‘the problem of time - especially its physical-cosmological and metaphysical aspects - does not occupy a place of any great importance in the Italian dialogues’ (p. 492).

aspect of how they reflect on their existence. As such these ideas arguably require more than a cursory reflection on time; instead they touch on many different aspects of philosophy throughout the entirety of the works in question. Therefore it will also be useful to keep in mind the purpose of their writing, combined with certain contextual factors that influenced them as they began to write; these points may well begin to provide reasons as to why they understood time in a particular way. In 'Des Livres' (II.X), Montaigne describes the purpose of the *Essais* thus: 'C'est icy purement l'essay de mes facultez naturelles, et nullement des acquises' (II.X.407). While he doesn't doubt that there are many things of which he knows little, and to which he would have to defer to 'les maistres du mestier' (i.e. philosophers), he can reliably talk about himself: 'Ce sont icy mes fantasies, par lesquelles je ne tasche point à donner à connoistre les choses, mais moy' (II.X.407). Here he suggests a willingness to relinquish the bookish authority of thinkers such as Aristotle; the *Essais* will draw upon his own direct experience rather than solely relying on the knowledge found in books, and it is his natural faculties, rather than supra-natural faculties i.e. faith in religion, that will take precedent.<sup>27</sup> Such an approach also begins to explain why Montaigne is concerned with the experiences of his natural and mutable human body rather than the inner workings of celestial or godly beings.

In a certain sense, Bruno is similarly keen to shed the traditional authority found in the scholarly books of his day, albeit for different reasons. Originality is a key feature of the Italian dialogues, from the *Cena de le Ceneri* - in which Bruno dismantles the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology that has been in use for centuries - to the unique combination of literary genres contained in the *Eroici Furori*.<sup>28</sup> Like Montaigne, Bruno is doing something new in his writing, which he makes very clear in the *Cena* within the context of his new cosmology. As I explain in further detail below, Bruno often employs a literary strategy in which he refers to himself as 'il Nolano', and in the following quotation il Nolano's status within the history of philosophy is confirmed: 'lui [Bruno] non veda per gli occhi di Copernico, né di Ptolomeo...ma per i proprii quanto al giudizio e la determinazione' (*Cena* I.447). Despite his praise of Copernicus, Bruno still possesses doubts about the theories of this respected innovator - instead Bruno claims to see the world through his own eyes and his own mind rather than those of Copernicus, Ptolemy, or indeed the 'innumerabili sciocchi, insensati, stupidi ed ignorantissimi' (*Cena* I.537) of

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<sup>27</sup> For an introduction see Terence Cave, *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta, 2007); also Ian Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> See Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, trans. by Paul Eugene Memmo (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Pr., 1964). Memmo states that '*De gli eroici furori* combines, for the first and the last time in Italian literature, the dialogue of the Platonic love treatise with the earlier tradition of prose commentary upon verses' (p. 21).

the Peripatetic school whose teachings he was once educated in. The various functions of bodies within Bruno's infinite universe must now be redefined, from planets and stars to the smallest atoms. The context below may begin to provide important clues as to why they formed these aims, and why such concerns would leave them free to develop individual conceptions of time rather than ones based on the dominant philosophical framework of their age. Although this section mainly draws upon criticism from critical editions of both the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues, I provide further insight by highlighting the inadequacy of previous 16th-century definitions of time when confronted with the objectives of Montaigne and Bruno.

Perhaps the thing that is most striking about the initial conception of the *Essais* is how much tragedy had already marked Montaigne's life before he began writing. Montaigne began writing the *Essais* in 1571, after mostly retiring from public life (he had previously entered into the magistrature as a member of the Bordeaux *Parlement*). His beloved father Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne - '[le] meilleur pere qui fut onques' (II.XII. 440) - had already died in 1568. Étienne de la Boétie was the author of the *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (1577) and Montaigne's closest friend, but he had also passed away a few years earlier in 1563 (the chapter 'De l'amitié' (I.XXVIII) is a reflection on their close friendship).<sup>29</sup> Death was a recurring feature of Montaigne's life; he and his wife had many children, but only his daughter Léonore survived childhood, while his family estate near Bordeaux was encircled by the bloody Wars of Religion between Catholics and Protestants. The violence of 'nos guerres civiles' would continually be referred to by Montaigne throughout the *Essais*, and the infamous St Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572 - which prompted the killing of thousands of Huguenots across France - occurred just a year after Montaigne had begun writing in his tower.

M.A. Screech has already highlighted these circumstances as having imprinted death, and particularly his own death, on Montaigne's mind as he sat down to write.<sup>30</sup> Montaigne certainly alludes to this concern in his preface 'Au lecteur':

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<sup>29</sup> Montaigne's father died before the publication of his son's translation of Raymond Sebond's *Theologia Naturalis* (1436), which Pierre himself had commissioned Montaigne to translate. The *Discours* was published clandestinely in 1577; the first phase of the text was written around 1549, while the second phase was completed in 1557.

<sup>30</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy* (London: Duckworth, 1983); see also Georges Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain I* (Paris: Plon et Éditions Du Rocher, 1952) and more recently Albert Ahmeti, *De la peinture du temps dans les 'Essais' de Montaigne* (Paris: Books On Demand, 2014). Philippe Desan is one prominent critic who takes exception to what he regards as a tendency to over focus on Montaigne's private life at the expense of his time in public office; see for example 'Montaigne, philosophe au quotidien: vie privée et vie publique dans les Essais', *Kriterion*, 53 (2012), pp. 331-349.

C'est icy un livre de bonne foy, lecteur. Il t'advertit dès l'entrée, que je ne m'y suis proposé aucune fin, que domestique et privée. [...] Je l'ay voué à la commodité particuliere de mes parens et amis: à ce que m'ayant perdu (*ce qu'ils ont à faire bien tost*) ils y puissent retrouver aucuns traits de mes conditions et humeurs, et que par ce moyen ils nourrissent plus entiere et plus vifve, la connoissance qu'ils ont eu de moy.<sup>31</sup> (I.3)

The foreword to his readers is extremely short, but in it, he clearly expresses a belief that his own death will occur relatively soon - he already considers his writing to be a kind of legacy, a way for his close friends and family to remember him after he is dead. Screech suggests that Montaigne wrote the *Essais* in order to exorcise the grief he felt after the death of his friend La Boétie.<sup>32</sup> I argue that not only in light of the passing of his dear friend, but the deaths of so many people around him (friends, family and strangers alike), that Montaigne projected this reality onto himself and began to think more about his own death.<sup>33</sup> Thus the *Essais* may well have grown from a desire to somehow come to terms with a future overshadowed by death; it is not unreasonable to suggest that this awareness of death would strongly affect Montaigne's understanding of time more generally.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, it is interesting to note, in relation to his comments in 'Des Livres', Montaigne's apparent distancing of himself from society as he sat down to write. Although previous critical editors from M.A. Screech to Michel Magnien disagree as to the true extent of Montaigne's actual retirement from public life, it is clear that part of his motivation was a desire to write a project about himself: 'L'heure était venue de se donner à lui-même, et il se pensait prêt'.<sup>35</sup> While it is important to remember that many of his contemporaries would still primarily have thought of his book as a series of 'moral, political and military discourses' (the first Italian translation in 1590 referred to them as

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<sup>31</sup> Emphasis own.

<sup>32</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. xiv. See also Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonen (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 'Un homme un livre'; George Hoffmann, 'Portrayal from Life, or to Life. The *Essais*'s Living Effigy', *French Forum*, 25.2 (2000), pp. 145-163.

<sup>33</sup> See Ahmeti, 'Introduction' in which he argues that the wording of the preface reveals Montaigne's sentiment that he is on the verge of death, but he knows not when: 'Montaigne désigne les destinataires particuliers de son livre et révèle la finalité de l'écriture de celui-ci, finalité qu'il lie étroitement à sa mort' ('Introduction').

<sup>34</sup> Ahmeti has already argued that these contextual factors led Montaigne to acknowledge 'la fugacité du temps'. He translates Montaigne's *angoisse* into 'ce sentiment très prononcé de la brièveté du temps de vie' ('Introduction').

<sup>35</sup> Montaigne, *Les Essais*, p. xii. See also *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech and *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonen. Screech describes Montaigne's purpose in retiring thus: 'His plan was, like cultured gentlemen in Ancient Roman times, to devote himself to learned leisure' (p. xiv). On the other hand, in 'Un homme, un livre' Michel Magnien and Catherine Magnien-Simonen wish to dispel some of the myths surrounding the author, the first being that he retired completely from public life.

such), scholars have argued that Montaigne viewed himself as the primary subject of his writing from at least 1580 onwards.<sup>36</sup> In his short preface to the reader, Montaigne carefully states that his writing has only one subject - himself. 'Ainsi, lecteur, je suis moy-mesmes la matiere de mon livre' (I.3); 'Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contention et artifice: car c'est moy que je peins' (I.3). Here Montaigne deliberately addresses the reader as someone who knows (or will get to know) the author intimately, as a friend or family member. This open and honest approach is partially a strategy to protect himself; Montaigne is aware that parts of his book test the limits of 16th century religious and political convention and so he styles the text more along the lines of a confessional.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, the *Essais* are the attempted elaboration of a 'sagesse personnelle', a 'peinture de moi' as the overarching subject.<sup>38</sup> Arguably the *Essais* were produced amidst a genuine awareness of death - and consequently the brevity of time - combined with a desire to look inwardly at oneself and grasp the essence of being.

I have suggested that Montaigne's decision to retreat to his library and write was spurned partly by an acknowledgement that he himself was a worthy subject for discussion. Arguably Bruno had also started to develop an awareness of the need to distance himself from certain sections of society - particularly those people he considered to be pedants and blind followers of Aristotle - albeit for very different reasons.<sup>39</sup> At the age of thirty-five, he wrote the *Cena de le Ceneri* (1584), the first of six texts that constitute the so-called Italian dialogues. By this time, Bruno had already fallen foul of various institutions. Against the backdrop of the Counter Reformation - which continued to divide Europe along religious lines - Bruno found himself clashing with many different sects. He had been forced to move from country to country after a trial for heresy had begun to be prepared by the Catholic Church in Rome - Bruno had been caught reading and promoting banned texts during his days as a Dominican friar at the Convento San Domenico Maggiore in Naples. In 1578 he went to Geneva, but after

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<sup>36</sup> Szabari claims that Montaigne's project of self-representation can be found 'at least' from 1580 onwards until his death. See Antonia Szabari, 'parler seulement de moi: The Disposition of the Subject in Montaigne's Essay "De l'art de conferer"', *Modern Language Notes*, 116.5 (2001), pp. 1001-1024 (p. 1005).

<sup>37</sup> See Cave, *How to Read Montaigne*, 'Chapter 7 - Documenting the Self'.

<sup>38</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Alexandre Micha (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> I refer once more to the scholars of academic institutions in the 16th century - Bruno was not entirely cut off from society, and in fact he had presented his work to the most prominent figures in the European courts, including the Pope, the French King and also courtiers to Queen Elizabeth I. For more information on Bruno's wanderings in Europe, see Eugenio Canone, *Giordano Bruno: gli anni napoletani e la "peregrinatio" europea: immagini, testi, documenti* (Cassino: Università degli studi di Cassino, 1992).

publishing criticism of a Calvinist professor, Bruno was arrested and eventually had to leave the city. Following a stint in Toulouse and a two-year sojourn in Paris, Bruno suffered severe humiliation within academic circles in England - upon travelling to Oxford in 1583 he gave a series of lectures there, but had been accused of plagiarising Ficino and was hounded from the intellectual community. Thus at the time of writing the *Cena* he was not lecturing but acting as a gentleman scholar in London, in the house of Michel de Castelnau, the French ambassador. The *Cena de le Ceneri* was written after just under ten years of drifting from country to country, falling foul of various religious factions and members of the intellectual establishment in the late 1500s.

Bruno does not give the equivalent of an 'Au lecteur' to his readers, although the inclusion of a sonnet at the start of the *Cena* entitled 'Al Mal contento' arguably betrays a similar sense of willingness to retreat from society as Montaigne (a 'malcontent' in Elizabethan drama was a character discontented with the social structure and other characters in a play). Furthermore, the 'Proemiale Epistola' which follows this sonnet hints at a sense of self-imposed intellectual isolation,<sup>40</sup> linked not only to Bruno's experiences with the Catholic Church, the Calvinists and the Oxford dons, but also due to his radical transformation of Copernican theory (Copernicus' *De revolutionibus* had been published over forty years earlier).<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Bruno's main purpose in the *Cena* is to expound a brand new cosmology that undermines Christian doctrine and Aristotelian thought. In the first dialogue, Bruno states his belief that Copernicus did not go far enough in his own efforts to change how learned society viewed the cosmos:

Al che è divenuto per essersi liberato da alcuni presuppositi falsi de la comone e volgar filosofia, non voglio dir cecità. Ma però non se n'è molto allontanato; perché lui [Copernicus], più studioso de la matematica che de la natura, non ha possuto profundar e penetrar sin tanto che potesse a fatto toglier via le radici de inconvenienti e vani principii... (*Cena* I.448-449)

Despite the best efforts of Copernicus before him, Bruno felt that there was still a flaw in the Polish astronomer's cosmology, and Bruno believed that it was he who was on the verge of expounding the true cosmology. He considered the geocentric Ptolemaic

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<sup>40</sup> The frontispiece of the *Candelaio*, published just before the *Cena*, famously describes Bruno as 'accademico di nulla accademia'. However, it must also be acknowledged that Bruno's literary presentation of himself can sometimes be slightly exaggerated (see footnote 36 above).

<sup>41</sup> For more on Bruno's reimagining of Copernicus and how this conflicted with the standard cosmological model of the time, see Sergius Koderer, 'Timid Mathematicians vs. Daring Explorers of the Infinite Cosmos: Giordano Bruno, Literary Self-Fashioning and *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*', in *The Making of Copernicus: Early Modern Transformations of the Scientist and his Science*, ed. by Wolfgang Neuber, Thomas Rahn & Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2014).



system, in which a static Earth was at the centre of (amongst other spheres) the fixed stars and the *primum mobile*, to be a grave fallacy.<sup>42</sup> He well understood the conflict that his theories would create with Scholastics and religious groups alike. As suggested above, an important literary technique that Bruno adopts from the *Cena's epistola* onwards is to refer to himself as 'il Nolano' rather than using the usual 'io'.<sup>43</sup> Sergius Kodera claims that with this choice Bruno was trying to forge a new identity for himself as an author - referring to himself in this way allowed him a certain freedom to move outside the bounds of the institution and express radical new theories under the literary guise of 'il Nolano'. He combines this technique with several passages of bombastic language that appear to herald the dramatic arrival of Bruno's philosophy:

che de' farsi di questo [il Nolano], che ha ritrovato il modo di montare al cielo, discorrere la circonferenza de le stelle, lasciarsi a le spalli la convessa superficie del firmamento? (*Cena* I.452)

Or ecco quello [il Nolano], ch'ha varcato l'aria, penetrato il cielo, discorse le stelle, trapassati gli margini del mondo, fatte svanir le fantastiche muraglie de le prime, ottave, none, decime ed altre, che vi s'avesser potuto aggiungere, sfere, per relazione de vani matematici e cieco veder di filosofi volgari... (*Cena* I.454)

After his honest evaluation of Copernicus' legacy, Bruno presents himself as one who has pierced the skies, 'penetrato il cielo' with his theories; he has broken through the boundaries of Ptolemy's firmament to go beyond the 'margini del mondo' and will now introduce his conception of an infinite universe (in opposition to the theories of 'vani matematici'). Of course, there is a hidden purpose to this exaggerated - almost messianic - self-portrayal; Bruno adopts this strategy as a way of preparing his readers for the new cosmology he is about to introduce. If Bruno is purposely expanding and opening out the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology in spatial terms, then equally Aristotle's definition of time - which relies on the premise that the universe is closed and that movement on Earth is caused by the *primum mobile* - will no longer be valid within Bruno's philosophy. In other words, Bruno has identified a pressing need to respond to centuries of error with a new theory that would involve a complete upheaval of late 16th-century philosophy; one in which the dominant Scholastic definition of time would certainly no longer be

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<sup>42</sup> See Hill, Chapter 2 'The Aristotelian Cosmos' for a brief but clear description of this cosmology, including helpful images from Peter Apian's *Cosmographia* (1524).

<sup>43</sup> Kodera on Bruno's literary self-fashioning: 'In an environment hostile to his ideas, 'il Nolano' (as he liked to call himself, thus also trying to forge a new identity for himself as an author) not only defended the heliocentric system, but went much further than what he considered to be the limited mathematical and geometric calculations of Copernicus (whom he nevertheless regarded an enormously gifted astronomer)' (p. 230).

appropriate. As we will see, the existence of bodies in time would need to be carefully redefined as part of this highly complex process. I hope to have illustrated here that Bruno wrote Italian dialogues amidst a very real disillusionment with the religious and intellectual establishments of his age. Bruno developed individual conceptions of time rather than ones based on Aristotle's definition as part of his wider attempts to refute the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmos.

At first glance, the respective biographical context surrounding both thinkers appears to be worlds apart. Montaigne was a nobleman retiring at the age of 38, around 15 years before Bruno began writing the *Cena*. Although he was very well-educated and well-versed in classical works, Montaigne had not written that much save for the translation of Sebond.<sup>44</sup> In addition, he had already experienced a series of devastating personal losses. Bruno was a 35-year-old 'runaway friar' who had undergone a self-imposed exile due to his persecution by the Catholic Church. He had already published some works on the art of memory, but his relationship with the so-called academic elites of Europe was now strained.<sup>45</sup> Despite these differences, I hope to have illustrated here that it is relatively easy to understand why neither thinker would have felt particularly compelled to uphold the accepted teachings of the intellectual establishment. Montaigne was often writing in a state of self-imposed isolation, sat in his library tower and still grieving the losses of his close friend and father, ever mindful of his children and the sectarian violence ravaging his countrymen and women. Bruno had already severed ties with religious institutions in Catholic Italy and Calvinist Geneva. He was now growing philosophically distant from the English intellectuals he had clashed with, convinced that the cosmology they had been teaching was severely mistaken and taking it upon himself to put forward the correct theory on the infinite universe. Ageing, retirement, and death; exile, frustration, and innovation - these are arguably the conditions under which Montaigne and Bruno begin to write.

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<sup>44</sup> Montaigne received a distinctly humanist education, which was directed by his father and which Montaigne reflects on in the *Essais*. In 'De l'expérience' (III.XIII) he makes it clear that he did not receive anything like a traditional scholastic education: 'Non en gros, par leçons scholastiques, que je ne sçay point (et n'en vois naistre aucune vraye reformation en ceux qui les sçavent)...' (III.XIII.1077). See also 'De l'institution des enfans' (I.XXVI) for more of Montaigne's reflections on his childhood education.

<sup>45</sup> For an introduction to the history of mnemonic systems and Bruno's place within it see Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge, 1966).

## Bodies in Time

### *Montaigne, death and ageing*

In light of the context above, it is unsurprising that death is a significant theme in the *Essais*, and Montaigne's approach to it has not gone unnoticed by critics in the past. Previous scholars who have studied Montaigne and time - such as Françoise Joukovsky and Antoine Compagnon - have generally analysed chapters from the first book of the *Essais* (particularly the well-known 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir' (I.XX)), and discussion has often been devoted primarily to identifying the philosophical sources most useful to Montaigne in his thoughts on death.<sup>46</sup> Earlier studies have emphasised Montaigne's adoption of the Stoics in this regard, no doubt influenced by Pierre Villey's thesis about the *Essais* and the 'stoicism' of the first book.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, recent scholars and critical editors have disagreed over the extent to which theological concerns influence Montaigne in his thoughts on death.<sup>48</sup> However, this thesis will begin by leaving aside Montaigne's contemplation of philosophical sources and instead will look in more detail at the role of the human body in the *Essais* as a fundamental symbol of death and, consequently, of time.

Indeed, not only in the first book but arguably throughout the full span of the *Essais*, the most visible and immediate indicator of time is the human body, whether in reference to someone else's body, or indeed Montaigne's own. In 'De l'exercitation' (II.VI) he famously recounts his near-fatal horse accident and its aftermath, while later chapters such as 'De l'expérience' (III.XIII) dwell on various age-related bodily changes. Furthermore, Montaigne's interest in writing about himself naturally leads us to question what exactly he means by the 'self', and it appears that the body is an integral part of this selfhood, particularly concerning time. Ian Maclean has stated that in the *Essais* the *moy* is

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<sup>46</sup> See Ahmeti, 'Étape initiale'; Antoine Compagnon, 'L'écriture de l'instant dans les "Essais"', *Montaigne. 1588-1998, Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 5 (1998), pp. 1-20; Joukovsky, 'Chapitre I - Zénon et Epicure'.

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Villey, *Les sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne* (New York: B. Franklin, 1968). It must be stated that Villey's hypothesis, while rigorous in its attention to sources, is often disregarded today due to the belief among modern-day Montaigne scholars (including this author) that it is impossible to classify each book under one single philosophical current. For a particularly illuminating response to Villey see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

<sup>48</sup> See 'Mort' by Claude Blum in Philippe Desan, *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: H. Champion, 2004). Blum argues that in the first and second books, Montaigne's representation of time is overwhelmingly Christian. On the other hand, Micha boldly states that Montaigne's art of living and art of dying are not related to Christian principles, rather 'la mort qu'il [Montaigne] souhaite est un brusque saut dans le néant' (p. 22).

made up of both body and soul,<sup>49</sup> and also that ‘Montaigne prend grand soin de souligner l’importance du corps, C’est toujours à l’homme que nous avons affaire, “duquel la condition est merveilleusement corporelle” (III.8, 930)’.<sup>50</sup> The body in time that one encounters in these examples is a vulnerable body; it is changeable and susceptible to decay and disease.

This section examines evidence primarily taken from three chapters of the *Essais*: ‘Que le Goust des biens et des maux depend en bonne partie de l’opinion que nous en avons’ (I.XIV), ‘Coustume de l’Isle de Cea’ (II.III) and ‘De l’experience’, alongside brief references to ‘De l’exercitation’.<sup>51</sup> Despite appearing in different books, the Villey-Saulnier edition notes that the first two chapters listed here were probably written around 1572.<sup>52</sup> Many of the chapters produced during this period are heavily concerned with death and time; both the ‘Isle de Cea’ and ‘Que le Goust’ contain a particular focus on *la mort volontaire* and its subsequent relationship to time. On the other hand, ‘De l’experience’ is the final chapter of the entire *oeuvre* and was written over a decade later, between 1587 and 1588. The questions at the heart of ‘De l’experience’ bear a striking resemblance to the central themes of the two chapters listed above, as well as those of ‘De l’exercitation’: ‘Comment vieillir? Comment faire face à la maladie et à la douleur? À la mort?’.<sup>53</sup> However, the title of ‘De l’experience’ suggests that the *Essais* have come full circle; Montaigne is still concerned with drawing upon ‘l’observation du réel’ rather than the words of philosophers, a desire he originally expressed in the ‘Au lecteur’.<sup>54</sup> I will illustrate that the graphic destruction of the human body plays a highly significant role in Montaigne’s attempts to understand mortality.

‘Le corps n’a, sauf le plus et le moins, qu’un train et qu’un pli’ (I.XIV.266). This observation by Montaigne appears towards the middle of ‘Que le Goust’, a chapter that, like the ‘Isle de Cea’, contains numerous examples of the body dying in various ways. While the *pli* refers to the customary ‘bent’ of the body i.e. its natural and instinctive habits, the *train* of the body is arguably death, and Montaigne carefully emphasises that

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<sup>49</sup> In Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Augustine responds to the question ‘Who are you?’ thus: ‘I replied ‘A man’. I see in myself a body and a soul, one external, the other internal’ (p. 184).

<sup>50</sup> Maclean, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> For the ease of the reader, the first two chapters will subsequently be referred to as ‘Isle de Cea’ and ‘Que le Goust’.

<sup>52</sup> Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Villey & V.L. Saulnier, p. 305.

<sup>53</sup> Montaigne, *Les Essais*, p. 1831.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

he is interested in *le corps*. Indeed, although both chapters are fairly short in length, they are filled with countless instances that portray humans being stabbed, poisoned or otherwise mutilated. For example, Montaigne frequently recounts the dramatic and bloody violence of death in war-ravaged lands. In 'Que le Goust' Montaigne laments 'nos dernieres guerres de Milan' (I.XIV.53), and begins by recounting a tale of Counter-Reformation violence he heard from his father. Upon hearing which side was winning the war, 'il y veist tenir conte de bien vingt et cinq maistres de maison, qui s'estoient deffaits eux mesmes en une sepmaine' (I.XIV.53).<sup>55</sup> In fact this episode is one of the less shocking anecdotes; both 'Que le Goust' and 'Isle de Cea' feature several military examples of weapons devastating the body: 'dix coups d'espée en la chaleur du combat' (I.XIV.58); 'Damocritus [...] se donna de l'espée au travers le corps' (II.III.355); 'un Sicilien [...] mettant l'espée au poing, s'alla mesler furieusement, où il fut soudain envelopé et mis en pieces' (II.III.356); 'Jacques du Chastel [...] donna seul, à la veue d'un chacun, dans l'armée des ennemis, où il fut mis en pieces' (II.III.360). In 'Nos Affections s'emporent au delà de nous' (I.III) - a chapter well known for its reflections on death and dying - Captain Bayard, a celebrated commander in the wars of Milan, is described as having been 'blessé à mort d'une harquebusade dans le corps' (I.III.18). In this dizzying array of examples, the bodies of the soldiers are obliterated by knives and guns; the frailty of their bodies is emphasised whether they are being dismembered or stabbed. It is probable that the inclusion of such violent accounts of individuals killed in battle are partly a consequence of the bloody civil wars Montaigne had witnessed for years in his home country. Montaigne's chateau was encircled by violence; although Bordeaux remained Catholic, the Périgord and Guyenne regions experienced an influx of Protestantism. Several of Montaigne's neighbours converted to Protestantism or Calvinism, while others set up their own Catholic militias to support the king.<sup>56</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that battle imagery was so prevalent in the pages of the *Essais* when Montaigne himself felt like a prisoner in his own home due to the ongoing religious conflict in France.<sup>57</sup>

The onslaught of examples continues with graphic accounts of deaths that are not all necessarily related to war. There are some instances of group deaths: 'Xerxes [...] ayant ordonné allumer un grand bucher, et esgosiller femme, enfans, concubines et serviteurs,

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<sup>55</sup> The Wars of Milan occurred around the first half of the 16th century (1484-1559). See Richard Mackenney, *Sixteenth Century Europe: Expansion and Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1993), 'Some Chronological Landmarks'.

<sup>56</sup> See Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 101-108.

<sup>57</sup> He states as much in the *Essais* themselves, describing the area around his estate thus: 'une lieue de chez moy, qui suis assis dans le moiau de tout le trouble des guerres civiles de France' (II.VI.373).

les meit dans le feu, et puis soy-mesme' (II.III.357). Stabbings are also recounted several times, for example in the case of Fulvius, who kills his own family: 'ayant de ma main occis ma femme et mes enfans' (II.III.359).<sup>58</sup> Montaigne also includes some noteworthy Biblical acts of violence, including the fate of Nicanor, 'tout ensanglanté et chargé de coups....par l'une de ses plaies à deux mains ses entrailles, les déchirant et froissant...' (II.III.356). Images of blood, entrails and flesh permeate these chapters, either in the heat of battle or in cases of murder or suicide more generally, and Montaigne was certainly aware of how shocking the harsh brutality of these chapters would have appeared to his 16th-century readers. In this case, the individuals described above have succumbed to the one *train* or fate of the body in a somewhat gory and bloody manner. Indeed, his continued insistence on representing the body being stabbed, burnt - even eviscerated - in honest and open detail, focuses significant attention on the human body's role in our experience of time. As a result, the body becomes an undeniably physical representation of the precious nature of time. Rather than assessing key philosophical debates or theological issues, in the *Essais* temporal existence becomes entirely dependent on the image of the body and its continued survival.

However, this rather simple idea regarding the certainty of death is complicated by Montaigne's reflections on the 'natural order' of time. There are both natural and unnatural ways to die, and all of the examples above feature humans dying due to the actions of other human beings (or indeed themselves). According to Montaigne, these are lives which have been cut short, 'avant le temps et l'occasion' (II.III.355) i.e. before the 'right' time. Instead, in 'Nos Affections' Montaigne refers to those who die from old age as those people 'qui a vescu et qui a mort *selon ordre*' (I.III.17). In 'Que philosopher' he finds comfort in the idea that for each individual, their existence in time (of which death is one part) is dictated by an overarching 'order': 'Vostre mort est une des pieces de l'ordre de l'univers. C'est une piece de la vie du monde' (I.XX.92). Nature also has a plan for humans from the moment they are born, and unsurprisingly death is the intended outcome: 'Elle (la Nature) n'a ordonné qu'une entrée à la vie, et cent mille yssues' (II.III.368-369). It is Nature that has given human beings one entry into the world, and - rather than the bloodthirsty actions of other human beings - Nature should also offer 'cent mille yssues' out of it.

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<sup>58</sup> 'Jubellius [...] tirant un glaive qu'il avoit caché, se donna au travers la poitrine, tombant renversé mourant aux pieds du Consul' (II.III.359); 'Auguste...sans autrement marchander, se donna d'une espée dans le corps' (II.III.358). Even incense appears in a deadly context: 'un autre donnant de l'encens à un sacrifice, le charbon luy estant tombé dans la manche, se laissa brusler jusques à l'os' (I.XIV.59).

In 'De l'expérience' Montaigne expands on these sentiments even further. He employs graphic imagery to illustrate that over time; one may begin to experience some unpleasant bodily changes, for example to 'vomir jusques au sang, souffrir des contractions et convulsions estranges' (III.XIII.1091) or to experience 'les urines espesses et effroyables' (III.XIII.1091). However, this is just a natural part of life: 'tu ne meurs pas de ce que tu es malade; tu meurs de ce que tu es vivant' (III.XIII.1091). Human beings have no control over whether they are born or not. Similarly, when we take into account the natural order of time, they appear to have little choice in their death, it is a necessary condition of their existence. Montaigne is fascinated by deaths that have occurred due to murder, suicide or accidental death, but these are decidedly unnatural i.e., they have taken place before the right time, or rather, before Nature's time. He understands that the body's existence in time is primarily dictated in natural terms - it is born, it undergoes change (ageing and disease), and then it dies - this process constitutes the 'natural order'. Eventually, we will see that the body's time is not always fully understood in such simple terms, even by the mind.

In the examples above, Montaigne uses various history books and philosophical accounts - particularly Plutarch's *Moralia* and Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius* - to illustrate examples of death and dying before the 'right time'. However, if the *Essais* are partly an account of himself, then it is only natural that Montaigne simultaneously contemplates his own body in time. As proof of what Maclean has termed Montaigne's 'vérité de l'expérience', Montaigne dutifully examines his own ageing body in order to probe the idea of the body in time further.<sup>59</sup> The examples below illustrate how different his approach to the body was in comparison to artists and engravers such as Tory. The *Champfleury* used the body in a proportionate sense, representing its perfect dimensions, whereas Montaigne unveils the body in all of its imperfections. Tory considered the body to be a universal measure of proportion; he saw in the body the exact measurements and shapes of letters and other forms. In the *Champfleury* the body is a symbol of order, 'les orifices du visage de l'homme, organes de perception et de connaissance, correspondent ainsi aux modalités des lettres'.<sup>60</sup> The *Essais* consider the human body in an extremely different light. In the opening sentences of 'De l'expérience' - bearing in mind the significance of the chapter title - Montaigne remains true to the purpose he initially expressed briefly but eloquently in the 'Au lecteur':

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<sup>59</sup> Maclean, p. 70. Joukovsky argues that 'c'est surtout sa propre expérience qui révèle à Montaigne la loi de la mutation physique' (p. 73).

<sup>60</sup> Pierre Cordier, 'Geoffroy Tory et les leçons de l'Antique', *Anabases*, 4 (2006), pp. 11-32 (p. 27).

En fin, toute cette fricassée que je barbouille icy n'est qu'un registre des essais de ma vie, qui est, pour l'interne santé, exemplaire assez à prendre l'instruction à contre-poil. Mais quant à la santé corporelle, personne ne peut fournir d'expérience plus utile que moy, qui la presente pure, nullement corrompue et alterée par art et par opinion. (III.XIII.1079)

The *Essais* have acted as a record of Montaigne's life, and in his old age he is interested in his *santé corporelle*, particularly since 'la vieillesse [...] est un signe indubitable de l'approche de la mort' (III.XIII.1095). The very last page of the *Essais* contains a prayer for good health to the god Apollo, 'protecteur de santé et de sagesse' (III.XIII.1116).<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the 'Au lecteur' stated that 'Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, *sans contention et artifice*' (I.3). Therefore the act of writing bears honest witness to the changes to his aged body: 'A faute de memoire naturelle j'en forge de papier, et comme quelque nouveau symptome survient à mon mal, je l'escris' (III.XIII.1092). Rather than the body representing a universal source of proportion, Montaigne considers the body in a distinctly individual sense as a profound and honest symbol of change. Throughout 'De l'expérience' he makes several references to his (old) age and ageing in general: 'les bastimens de mon aage ont naturellement à souffrir quelque goutiere...je paye par là le loyer deu à la vieillesse' (III.XIII.1090).<sup>62</sup> Montaigne reveals a preoccupation with the bodily changes he has experienced as he grows older: 'L'aage affoiblit la chaleur de mon estomac; sa digestion en estant moins parfaite' (III.XIII.1092). However, as well as minor age-related complaints, Montaigne also famously suffered from painful kidney stones (*pierres*), a condition he was genetically predisposed to and one which began to trouble him in the late 1570s onwards.<sup>63</sup> Consequently he suffers some distressing bodily symptoms; if 'les urines' that he manages to produce are not 'espesses, noires, et effroyables' (III.XIII.1091), then they have been stopped altogether by 'quelque pierre espineuse et herissée qui te poinct et escorche cruellement le col de la verge' (III.XIII.1091).

The infamous *pierres* take on an even more prominent role in the *Journal de Voyage* - written in both French and Italian - which detailed a journey Montaigne made with his

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<sup>61</sup> The full address from Horace's *Odes* reads thus: 'Frui paratis et valido mihi,/Latoe, dones, et, precor, integra/Cum mente, nec turpem senectam/Degere, nec cythara carentem' (III.XIII.1116).

<sup>62</sup> 'Le dormir a occupé une grande partie de ma vie, et le continue encores en cet aage' (III.XIII.1096).

<sup>63</sup> See Cave, *How To Read Montaigne*, 'Chapter 6 - Travel'; Montaigne also recounts the awful pain this condition must have caused him in 'De la diversion' (III.IV): 'L'opiniastreté de mes pierres, specialement en la verge, m'a par fois jetté en longues suppressions d'urine, de trois, de quatre jours, et si avant en la mort que c'eust esté folle d'esperer l'éviter, voyre desirer, veu les cruels efforts que cet estat apporte. O que ce bon Empereur qui faisoit lier la verge à ses criminels pour les faire mourir à faute de pisser, estoit grand maistre en la science de bourrellerie!' (III.IV.837).



secretary through Switzerland, Germany, and Italy in 1580 and 1581.<sup>64</sup> The *Journal* is very different in tone and purpose from the *Essais*, to such an extent that some scholars initially doubted whether the passages attributed to Montaigne were even really his at all (Montaigne's secretary is responsible for recording most of the trip until Rome). Furthermore, despite its relatively straightforward name, the text is arguably a detailed record of Montaigne's struggle with his medical condition and its side effects. The attention devoted to bodily concerns is clear and graphic physical descriptions of Montaigne's body - similar to those found in the *Essais* - quickly emerge, albeit with a slightly more detached tone. For example, at one point the secretary notes in passive terms that 'il [Montaigne] a toujours cependant la bouche toute sanglante' (II.128). A typical passage from the *Journal* (again narrated by the secretary) notes Montaigne's symptoms with careful attention to detail:

Nous arrestames audict lieu depuis ledict jour 18<sup>e</sup> jusques au 27<sup>e</sup> de Septembre. M. de Montaigne beut onze matinées de ladicte eau, neuf verres huict jours, & sept verres trois jours, & se beigna cinq fois. Il trouva l'eau aysée à boire & la randoit tous jours avant disner. Il n'y connut nul autre effect que d'uriner. L'appetit, il l'eut bon ; le sommeil, le ventre, rien de son état ordinaire ne s'empira par cette potion. Le sixiesme jour il eut la colicque très vehemente, & plus que les siennes ordineres, & l'eut au costé droit, où il n'avoit jamais senty de douleur qu'une bien legiere à Arsac, sans opération. (I.34-35)

Readers solely familiar with the *Essais* will note that the tone is vastly different here. The passage is almost clinical and appears to resemble a medical record with its attention to the amount of water Montaigne drank, while the physical effects suffered by the nobleman are listed in stringent detail.<sup>65</sup> With regards to time, the dates are often meticulously noted throughout the *Journal* as above: 'depuis ledict jour 18<sup>e</sup> jusques au 27<sup>e</sup> de Septembre'. However, despite the strict attention given over to dates and duration, the temporality of the text arguably comes to be dictated by the rhythmic interference of the kidney stones. Indeed, unlike in the *Essais*, a fascinating intersection emerges between time and the kidney stones as the reader moves through Montaigne and his secretary's detailed account of the nobleman's changing body each day. The *pierres* are the real markers of time, in all of their painful reality. They crop up persistently at every turn: 'Les

<sup>64</sup> See Michel de Montaigne, *Journal de voyage de Michel de Montaigne en Italie, par la Suisse et l'Allemagne en 1580 & 1581*, 3 vols, ed. by Anne Gabriel Querlon (Paris: 1774). All quotations taken from the *Journal* will be followed by in-text citations in the following format: (Volume Number.Page Number).

<sup>65</sup> See also Cynthia Skenazi, 'Une écriture de la vieillesse: Les "excremens d'un vieil esprit" et la vanité Montaignienne', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 68.2 (2006), pp.289-305; José Miguel Marinas, 'Le sujet est le corps: de Montaigne à Lacan à travers les mystiques', *Rue Descartes*, 26 (1999), pp.33-43.

deux premiers jours, il rendit deux petites pierres qui estoient dedans la vessie' (I.36); 'Questo dì sentii un dolore al pettignone come del cascar di pietre, e ne feci una picciola' (III.104). Much like time itself, the pain caused by his kidney stones cannot seem to be fully mastered or brought under control - Montaigne is merely searching for ways to alleviate it temporarily. As a result, the text returns periodically to the stones, which are dotted continuously throughout the text.

Perhaps the most extreme reflections on Montaigne's own body appear in 'De l'exercitation', a chapter which appears towards the beginning of the second book of the *Essais*. In a confused and hazy account of the injuries he suffered after being thrown from a horse, Montaigne himself is put forward in the *Essais* as another bloody and dramatic example of the fragility of the body. After the fall, the rest of his party saw his 'visage tout meurtry et tout escorché' (II.VI.373), his body was lifeless 'n'ayant ny mouvement ny sentiment' (II.VI.373). He recounts the 'grand abondance de sang dans mon estomac' (II.VI.373); that his 'pourpoint estoit taché par tout du sang' (II.VI.374). Amongst the confusion he remembers believing that he had experienced 'une harquebusade en la teste' (II.VI.374). As we will see in Chapter Two, Montaigne's stylistic innovation while narrating this incident allows him to experiment with the seemingly rigid and linear understanding of time outlined here. For now, it is enough to understand that Montaigne's act of recording himself and his own body in time includes his dramatic brush with death and the effect of ageing on his body.

Montaigne also couples these reflections with a criticism of the doctors of his time. Similarly to the bloodthirsty, 'unnatural' examples of death that opened this section, Montaigne believes that doctors are tampering with the natural order of time by trying to cure illnesses. Thus he proudly states: 'J'ay laissé envieillir et mourir en moy de mort *naturelle* des reumes, defluxions gouteuses, relaxation, battement de coeur, micraines et autres accidens' (III.XIII.1089).<sup>66</sup> Montaigne staunchly believes that it is better to suffer in line with 'les loix de nostre condition'; the fevers and heart flutterings are natural symptoms of an ageing body: 'Nous sommes pour vieillir, pour affoiblir, pour estre malades, en despit de toute medecine' (III.XIII.1089). A couple of paragraphs later he states that 'la goutte, la gravelle, l'indigestion sont symptomes des longues années, comme des longs voyages la chaleur, les pluyes et les vents. [...] Il faut apprendre à souffrir ce qu'on ne peut eviter' (III.XIII.1089). Such remarks appear to suggest that one should leave these changes untreated and accept them as natural effects of ageing. This attitude

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<sup>66</sup> Emphasis own.

becomes even more apparent when Montaigne's tooth falls out, and he famously remarks that this happened because the tooth had reached the end of its duration: 'Voilà une dent qui me vient de choir, sans douleur, sans effort: c'estoit le terme naturel de sa durée' (III.XIII.101).<sup>67</sup> Arguably even our teeth possess their own duration, and one must accept this rather than attempt to control it. He also considers his painful kidney stones to be a result of the body's natural propensity to cleanse itself: 'nature vuide en ces pierres ce qu'elle a de superflu et nuisible' (III.XIII.1094). Montaigne takes comfort in the certainty of his destiny, which conforms to the natural order of time: 'A la verité, je recoy une principale consolation, aux pensées de ma mort, qu'elle soit des justes et naturelles' (III.XIII.1101). Doctors who 'interfere' with diseases are meddling with this certainty: 'Tout ce qui vient au revers du cours de nature peut estre fascheux' (III.XIII.1102). According to Montaigne, doctors are guilty of taking time into their own hands and altering the course of the body, when they should be allowing the body to follow its natural progression instead.

In the *Essais*, the human body holds an important function within Montaigne's understanding of time. If it is true that 'le corps a une grand'part à nostre estre, il y tient un grand rang' (II.XVII.639), then concerning time, it is used in the *Essais* to express in the most basic and clear terms the reality of human existence. The body's uninterrupted advance from birth to death constitutes the natural order of time, and this simple trajectory is largely independent of individual control. Some natural times and rhythms exist within the body, and according to Montaigne's criticism of doctors, they should be left to endure naturally.<sup>68</sup> Humans cannot know when and how exactly they will die if the circumstances are left to Nature, but this appears to be the best way to go about living. Montaigne remarks that most people believe it is better to live in accordance with Nature, 'selon Nature', by prolonging life until it ends of its own accord i.e. 'maintenir sa vie, encore qu'il soit miserable' (II.III.369-370). In the next chapter I explore how Montaigne manages to question even this basic fact of life. However, here it is important to note that the body will always succumb to death, if through nothing else then certainly through old

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<sup>67</sup> There has been some interesting work done on the subject of Montaigne's tooth. See Jules Brody, 'From Teeth to Text in 'De l'expérience': A Philological Reading', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 20.1 (1980), pp. 7-22. In a similar vein, see Brody, 'De mesnager sa volonté (III.10): lecture philologique d'un essai', in *O un Amy!: essays on Montaigne in honour of Donald M. Frame*, ed. by Raymond C. La Charité (Lexington: French Forum, 1977), pp. 190-218. For further bibliography see Ann Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 262.

<sup>68</sup> In 'De la ressemblance' (I.XXXVII) Montaigne argues that doctors hasten our death, not lengthen it. He recounts how his uncle believed in doctors and died at the age of 45: 'Le seigneur de Gaviac, mon oncle paternel, homme d'Eglise, maladif dès sa naissance, et qui fit toutefois durer cette vie debile jusques à soixante-sept ans, estant tombé autrefois en une grosse et vehemente fièvre continue, il fut ordonné par les medecins qu'on luy declaireroit, s'il ne se vouloit aider (ils appellent secours ce qui le plus souvent est empeschement), qu'il estoit infalliblement mort. Ce bon homme, tout effrayé comme il fut de cette horrible sentence, si respondit-il: Je suis donq mort' (I.XXXVII.764-765).

age, or as we say even now, ‘naturally’: ‘Tout revient à un, que l’homme se donne sa fin, ou qu’il la souffre; qu’il coure au devant de son jour, ou qu’il l’attende’ (II.III.351). For Montaigne, the human body ‘in time’ as it were, has one trajectory to complete: it is born, it lives for a certain amount of time, it dies. This process is the single *train* or line that the body is naturally bound to follow.

### *Bruno, vicissitude and death*

Montaigne’s initial enquiry into bodies and temporality is admittedly very different to that of Bruno’s. In the *Essais* it is arguably easier to know where to look for thoughts on time, since Montaigne is honest about his consciousness of ageing and death, even recounting his own ‘death’ - or at least quasi-death - from falling off a horse. On the other hand, Bruno does not reflect on his death and says comparatively very little about death in general in the Italian dialogues. Unlike Montaigne, it certainly does not appear to constitute a fascinating and significant aspect of temporal existence. Of course, Bruno wrote his vernacular texts well before his lengthy imprisonment by the Catholic Church, a period in which a decidedly unnatural death by burning at the stake eventually defined Bruno’s tragic fate.<sup>69</sup> He did not appear to write anything during this time that might have led to specific reflections on the nature of his own death. Rather, in the earlier Italian dialogues, perhaps the most fundamental reality of time for Bruno - that would correlate to a certain degree with Montaigne’s understanding of the trajectory of the human body - is the notion of *vicissitudine*.

The few recent critics that have written exclusively on Bruno and time have all paid careful attention to vicissitude.<sup>70</sup> It is a concept that relates to Bruno’s monism, particularly his theories on the physical matter or *materia* (the human body would be one

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<sup>69</sup> One must assume that Bruno did not have an opportunity to write about (or at least publish) his thoughts on death during his time in prison. However, there are scant but nonetheless significant documents relating to Bruno’s *processo*, including a summary of his eight-year trial and final questioning by the Roman Inquisition. For more on Bruno’s trial, see Vincenzo Spampinato, *Vita di Giordano Bruno: con documenti editi e inediti* (Messina: Casa Editrice Giuseppe Principato, 1921); Angelo Mercati, *Il sommario del processo di Giordano Bruno con appendice di documenti sull’eresia e l’inquisizione a Modena nel secolo XVI* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1942); Luigi Firpo, *Il processo di Giordano Bruno* (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1959). See also Ingrid Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008) for a comprehensive biography of Bruno. I return to the topic of Bruno and his own death in Chapter Two, ‘Montaigne, suicide and near-death experience’.

<sup>70</sup> Nicola Badaloni, ‘Sulla struttura del tempo in Giordano Bruno’, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 3.1 (1997), pp. 11-45; Maria Elena Severini, ‘Vicissitudine e tempo nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno’, in *La mente di Giordano Bruno*, ed. by F. Meroi (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2004), pp. 225-258.

example of this) which he believes mutates endlessly.<sup>71</sup> However, vicissitude arguably encompasses everything that constitutes a change of state - it not only appears in specific philosophical discussions concerning matter, substance, and form, but also incorporates more abstract temporal concepts such as death, fortune and history. Vicissitude was a term being explored in the 15th and 16th centuries by well-known thinkers such as Machiavelli; it was a particularly popular concept in France, employed by the French writer Louis Le Roy (1510-1577) and - as we will see in Chapter Three - even Montaigne himself.<sup>72</sup> Vicissitude was also a fundamental aspect of Bruno's radical philosophy; according to Maria Elena Severini, it is the 'struttura fondamentale della realtà' across the entirety of his works.<sup>73</sup> As such, this section will begin to explore what exactly vicissitude is, and how it can be used to think about bodies in time within the Italian dialogues. While Montaigne focused on the microcosm of the human body to explain fundamental characteristics of time, Bruno examines another microcosmic concept - the atom - which he then uses to explain the existence of all bodies in time.

This section analyses evidence from Bruno's first work in the Italian dialogues - the *Cena de le Ceneri* - as well as passages taken from his third dialogue, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi* (1584), and Bruno's satirical play *Candelaio* (1582). However, the majority of examples in this section derive from the first dialogue of the second part of the *Eroici Furori* (1585). While the first three texts in the Italian dialogues are primarily devoted to expounding aspects of Bruno's infinite universe, the later dialogues attempt to reshape individual behaviour in light of these theories.<sup>74</sup> The *Furori* was the final text written by the author in Italian and is described by Nuccio Ordine in a corresponding foreword as the conclusion to this particular series of Bruno's works.<sup>75</sup> It is primarily a reaction to the superficial language of the Petrarchists, an attempt to transform 'un

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<sup>71</sup> For a general introduction see Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, 'L'unità di materia e forma' by Nuccio Ordine.

<sup>72</sup> See Marie-Madeleine de La Garandière, 'La méditation philosophique sur le temps au XVIème siècle : Budé, Montaigne', in *Le Temps et la Durée dans la littérature au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance* (Paris: Nizet, 1986), pp. 193-209 (p. 195).

<sup>73</sup> Severini, p. 225.

<sup>74</sup> Giordano Bruno, *On the Heroic Frenzies*, trans. by Ingrid D. Rowland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). Bruno was actively copying Platonic dialogue form in setting about to write this final text in the series: 'Bruno carefully specified that the *furori* he would treat in his own dialogue were "heroic" cases of divine possession, preparing his readers for a dialogue that, like Plato's Symposium, aimed to bring them closer and closer to understanding the joys of a love that took wisdom as its object - an eternal principle rather than a single individual. Nothing in the restrained, elegant Plato can compare, however, with the bitter impetus Bruno puts into his Argument' (p. xix).

<sup>75</sup> Ordine writes in his introduction to the *Opere italiane*: 'Inanella i testi con particolare abilità. Getta prima le basi della sua cosmologia infinitistica. E dopo aver liberato l'universo dalle sue catene del geocentrismo, cerca di liberare...la materia, l'etica, l'estetica e la conoscenza. [...] Bruno scrive la Cena ed ha già in mente, per grandi linee, i Furori' (p. 41).

linguaggio asfittico, svuotato di ogni rapporto con il mondo' into something that can express Bruno's newly-theorised infinite universe with energy and meaning.<sup>76</sup> Bruno uses an inventive play on Platonic dialogue form, whereby each dialogue sees two interlocutors (in this case Cesarino and Maricondo), analysing a series of sonnets that describe various stages of 'heroic love' and attempting to uncover their true meaning hidden beneath the language. In this section I examine how the existence of various bodies is defined by a constant change from state to state - death is but one part of this process, which (as in Montaigne's work) appears to constitute a kind of 'natural order' in time.

Bruno often discusses *vicissitudine* in terms of matter, which is composed of substance and form. Unlike Aristotle, who proposed that corruptible substances exist solely in the terrestrial sphere, Bruno considered all substances in the infinite universe to be corruptible, even planets and stars.<sup>77</sup> This discussion is primarily concerned with what Bruno terms *sustanza corporea* or corporeal substance, i.e. the substance that mortal, sublunar beings are made up of (in opposition to *sustanza soprasustanziale*).<sup>78</sup> Bruno primarily expresses all earthly 'bodies' - such as the human body, plants, mountains and trees - in terms of their material composition. One of the most detailed explanations of vicissitude appears in the fifth and final dialogue of the *Cena de le Ceneri*.<sup>79</sup> Smitho, a sceptical English interlocutor and Teofilo, Bruno's literary mouthpiece, are discussing the cause of 'il moto locale della terra' (*Cena* I.555). Teofilo attributes the cause of the Earth's movement to vicissitude; he also explains that all of the various forms of matter on Earth do not stay the same and instead 'si vanno tutta via cangiando faccia di faccia' (*Cena* I.555). However, the substance of matter is incorruptible, and thus things only change state, rather than being destroyed entirely:

per che essendo la materia e sustanza delle cose incorrottibile, e dovendo quella secondo tutte le parti esser soggetto di tutte forme, a fin che secondo tutte le parti (per quanto è capace) si fia tutto, sia tutto, se non in un medesimo tempo et instante d'eternità, al meno in diversi tempi, in varii instanti d'eternità, successiva e vicissitudinalmente: per che quantumque tutta la materia sia capace di tutte le forme insieme, non però de tutte quelle insieme può essere capace ogni parte della materia. (*Cena* I.555-556)

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>77</sup> For an illuminating discussion on the corruptibility of stars and planets across Bruno's works see Miguel A. Granada, "Voi siete dissolubili, ma non vi dissolvete". Il problema della dissoluzione dei mondi in Giordano Bruno', *Paradigmi: rivista di critica filosofica*, 53 (2000), pp. 261-289.

<sup>78</sup> I will refer to celestial bodies where appropriate; see also Chapter Three 'Eternity, Time and Truth'.

<sup>79</sup> Nuccio Ordine argues in his Introduction to the *Opere Italiane* that the *Candelaio* (1582), a play written in the vernacular in Paris, should be considered the first text within this series (p. 41).

Teofilo continues to explain that ultimately ‘la morte e la dissoluzione’ of all things on Earth is impossible; instead, ‘a tempi a tempi, con certo ordine, viene a rinnovarsi alterando, cangiando, mutando le sue parti tutte’ (*Cena* I.556). Vicissitude involves the constant change or mutation of things from state to state. While the substance of matter itself is incorruptible, it is ‘soggetto di tutte forme’ - the existence of bodies is one defined by perpetual transformation as substance continually moves through innumerable forms. Furthermore, we see here the first brief reference to a fundamental aspect of vicissitude, namely that since everything made of *sustanza corporeale* cannot be everything at once, the forms that it takes must be temporary: ‘in diversi tempi, in varii instanti d’eternità, successiva e vicissitudinalmente’.

Furthermore, in the *Cena de le ceneri* Bruno is faced with the difficulty of proving that the universe is infinite since it is impossible to demonstrate infinity without using abstract or metaphorical language.<sup>80</sup> Fortunately, the concept of vicissitude is much more easily visible to the human eye:

[...] e questo l’esperienza d’ogni giorno nel dimostra: che nel grembo e viscere della terra, altre cose s’accoglieno et altre cose da quelle ne si mandan fuori. E noi medesmi e le cose nostre andiamo e vegnamo passiamo e ritorniamo: e non è cosa nostra che non si faccia aliena, e non è cosa aliena che non si faccia nostra. (*Cena* I. 556)

Again there is a strong spatial component to this description; Bruno describes matter as leaving and then returning. But the second half of this description is particularly important - ‘noi medesmi e le cose nostre’ will come and go. We can witness how our bodies (as in the *Essais*) and the bodies of things around us are coming and going endlessly - our bodies change and die, to be replaced by others. Furthermore, Bruno uses everyday experience, rather than the words of philosophers, to support this argument: ‘e questo l’esperienza d’ogni giorno nel dimostra’. Vicissitude is a constant changing from state to state, which Bruno observes daily in nature itself; while he often explains vicissitude using philosophical terms, he still turns to direct experience as further proof, bringing to mind Montaigne’s strategy in the *Essais* and his devotion to exploring the so-called truth of experience. However, thus far vicissitude primarily appears to be a spatial, rather than a temporal theory: ‘il che conviene che sia con certa successione, ogn’una

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<sup>80</sup> Koder, p. 232. Koder also claims that this was a difficulty shared by both Bruno and his contemporaries: ‘One of the many serious difficulties in his [Bruno’s] message lies in his claim to realist physics in an infinite cosmos. For Bruno’s contemporaries the most fundamental problem consisted in making plausible what goes against all sensory experience and reason: the daily rotation of the earth around its axis and its annual motion. Vision cannot prove it because one cannot see that the earth is moving’ (p. 232).

prendendo il loco de l'altre tutto' (*Cena* I.556); each form takes the place (*loco*) of the one before it. The substance of matter is incorruptible, and subject to all forms; in an infinite universe this idea is transformed even further since the possible forms of matter become infinite too, 'tanto di forme quanto di luoghi'.

How exactly then does vicissitude relate to time, particularly the existence of bodies in time? Earlier I recounted Telesio's belief that vicissitude was a perfectly justifiable way to begin contemplating time, since that is how human beings first become aware of time. As we have seen, Bruno expresses similar ideas in the quotation from the *Cena* above, stating that humans can readily perceive the effects of vicissitude for themselves. However, in the first book of his *De rerum natura* (1565), Telesio develops this line of thought by criticising Aristotle; although time perception relies upon motion, this does not mean that the existence of time does too: 'It is not correct to conclude that time cannot exist without motor or mutation'.<sup>81</sup> As well as his criticism in the *Acrotismus*, like Telesio, Bruno departs from Aristotle and instead develops a theory of temporal impermanence which has more in common with atomism than Aristotelianism, and affects not only earthly bodies but indeed everything within the infinite universe.<sup>82</sup> In *De l'infinito, universo e mondi* Bruno continues to explain vicissitude in terms of flux, but here he emphasises its temporal characteristics with an explanation of what Badaloni describes as the birth, growth, and decline of bodies through the movement of atoms:

Nel corso del dialogo...Bruno dà un'interpretazione della teoria della vicissitudine, per cui nascita e crescita dei corpi e loro declino sono spiegati con l'influsso ed efflusso degli atomi, essendo assai ragionevole che "le parti et atomi abbiano corso e moto infinito per le infinite vicissitudini e transmutazioni, tanto di forme quanto di luoghi".<sup>83</sup>

All things come into being, grow and then die. Bruno is repeatedly careful to note that everything cannot be everything at once but in fact matter is changing at different times: 'ma tutto...cangia il volto' (*Infinito* II.26); 'dall'infinito sempre nova copia di materia sottonasce' (*Infinito* II.26). This idea that the nature of vicissitude brings about innumerable forms of matter is how Bruno expresses time in the *Candelaio*, in a humorous preface 'alla Signora Morgana B'. The play possesses a tripartite structure

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<sup>81</sup> Bernardino Telesio, *De rerum natura libri I-III*, ed. by Luigi De Franco (Cosenza: Casa del Libro, 1965). Translation own. Original quotation: 'at non recte, ut videtur, ex iis tempus sine motu et mutatione non esse colligit' (II.8-9). See also Hutton, p. 355.

<sup>82</sup> On the development of atomism in the late 1500s, see Hilary Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter Three - 'Bruno and the New Atomism'.

<sup>83</sup> Badaloni, p. 32.



centred around three common characters in Renaissance theatre: the lover, the alchemist and the pedant. However, Bruno's opening preface to the mysterious Signora Morgana B is a parodic choice, 'facendo riferimento a una prostituta mascherata da celebrazioni roboanti' (*Candelaio* I.261).<sup>84</sup> The speech on time comes at the end of a dedication in which Bruno addresses her thus: 'Ricordatevi, signora, di quel che credo che non bisogna insegnarvi' (*Candelaio* I.263):

il tempo tutto toglie e tutto dà; ogni cosa si muta, nulla s'annihila; è un solo che non può mutarsi, un solo è eterno, e può perseverare eternamente uno, simile e medesimo. [...] Però qualunque sii il punto di questa sera ch'aspetto, si la mutazione è vera, io che son ne la notte, aspetto il giorno, quei che son nel giorno, aspettano la notte. Tutto quel ch'è, o è cqua o là, o vicino o lungi, o adesso o poi, o presto o tardi. (*Candelaio* I.263-264)

Barberi Squarotti suggests that although Bruno wrote this passage in haste towards the end of the play's preface, the rest of the dialogues confirm this view of time. It certainly resonates with the descriptions of vicissitude in the *Cena*; there is a 'fullness' to time expressed in the *Candelaio* which relates to the idea that 'non è cosa nostra che non si faccia aliena, e non è cosa aliena'; due to the nature of vicissitude, time reveals everything. Discussing vicissitude in the Italian dialogues, Granada has emphasised that within vicissitude everything becomes everything else.<sup>85</sup> Bodies in time are expressed in terms of their temporary nature; they will eventually give way to something else that will replace them. I also believe that this description of time reassures the reader by lessening any concerns over the ambiguity of the future; 'si la mutazione è vera, io che son ne la notte, aspetto il giorno' - the existence of bodies in time is vicissitudinal to such an extent that the future possesses a significant degree of predictability.

Further examples of the 'ritmo vicissitudinale degli eventi' appear in the *Eroici Furori*. Indeed, discussing Bruno and time, Badaloni suggests that the *Eroici Furori* is important since it presents mutation through the lens of time.<sup>86</sup> In addition, the image of

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<sup>84</sup> Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 'Note' in *Opere Italiane*, ed. by Nuccio Ordine, vol. 1 (Turin: UTET, 2002), pp. 257-424 (p. 261).

<sup>85</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Cena de las cenizas*, trans. by Miguel A. Granada (Madrid: Alianza, 1987), p. ccxix.

<sup>86</sup> Badaloni, p. 34. "Nel *De gli eroici furori* è contenuta un'illuminata discussione sul tempo". He also discusses a different conversation between Cicada and Tansillo on the present moment and eternity which will be analysed further in Chapter Three.

‘la ruota del tempo’ (*Furori* II.661) continues to link the language of vicissitude to time.<sup>87</sup> Bruno’s literary form sees four sets of speakers discussing a series of verses and images in what has been described as a lengthy and intense discussion on the nature of poetry.<sup>88</sup> One of the symbols that the two interlocutors analyse is that of a wheel that moves continually around its centre, which appears alongside the motto *Manens Moveor*. Maricondo likens time to the movement of a wheel turning, ‘si muove in circolo’ (*Furori* II.661):

dove il moto concorre con la quiete, atteso che nel moto orbicolare sopra il proprio asse e circa il proprio mezzo si comprende la quiete e fermezza secondo il moto retto: over quiete del tutto, e moto secondo le parti; e da le parti che si muovono in circolo si apprendono due differenze di lazione, in quanto che successivamente altre parti montano alla sommità, altre dalla sommità descendono al basso; altre ottengono le differenze medianti, altre tengono l’estremo dell’alto e del fondo. (*Furori* II.661)

While the centre of the wheel stays the same, spinning, the parts of the edge turn constantly. Note the sense of balance and completeness that pervades this image of ‘la ruota del tempo’ - as one part of the wheel reaches ‘la sommità’ it must be replaced by another part descending towards ‘il basso’. The existence of bodies in time is defined by continual generation, ‘in questo stato e condizione si vederà sempre che trovarassi sotto il fato della generazione’ (*Furori* II.662). In his later Latin works, Bruno explicitly describes the stages of human life in terms of an expanding and contracting circle: ‘Se la nascita rappresenta l’inizio di un processo in espansione, la vita una sfera compiuta, la morte una contrazione verso il centro, ogni fenomeno naturale, ogni corpo rimandano alla sfera ed al centro’.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, as I have already suggested, Bruno uses this characteristic of vicissitude to demonstrate how a degree of predictability can be assigned to the future. As Bruno suggests in the *Cena* and subsequent texts, humanity’s existence within the process of historical change allows one to predict the next phase in the cycle: ‘però ora che siamo stati nella feccia delle scienze [...] possiamo certo aspettare de ritornare a miglior stati’ (*Furori* II.643). However, here it is enough to know that, as in the extracts from the *Cena de le Ceneri*, Bruno understands time through continual movement; the natural

<sup>87</sup> See Giordano Bruno, *Opere italiane*, p. 849. Previous critics have interpreted the ‘ruota del tempo’ as a symbol of fortune, but this theory does not explain why Bruno links vicissitude directly to his image. See Michele Ciliberto, *La ruota del tempo* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1986). Ciliberto adopts the phrase as the title of his monograph, in which he argues that Bruno’s thought in general possesses a distinct order and circularity: ‘è distinto da fortissimi, continui elementi di rielaborazione e di autoripensamento’ (p. 11).

<sup>88</sup> See Giordano Bruno, *On the Heroic Frenzies*, trans. by Ingrid D. Rowland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. xxiii.

<sup>89</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Opere Latine*, p. 5.

order of things comprises a continual motion of states that endure and replace one another.

Furthermore, Bruno emphasises how this conception of time is both a natural phenomenon and one that is outside of human control, seemingly affecting everything and everyone. All things on Earth exist within an order of time that, like Montaigne, he describes as the ‘natural’ order of things. Montaigne illustrates this idea through graphic corporeal imagery, ascribing a simple entry into and eventual departure from life. Bruno, on the other hand, identifies a vicissitudinal order of time which affects all material things, of which the human body is just one part. Badaloni describes this as a form of ‘divenire temporale’ while Carlo Monti characterises Bruno’s conception of the human body through constant change: ‘per cui, permanendo la medesima anima, il corpo va via via cambiando e rinnovandosi’.<sup>90</sup> This process of change and renewal also applies to the natural world; in the *Cena* we see geographical examples of how vicissitude affects natural phenomena such as sea and land: ‘i luoghi acquosi in certo tempo rimagnono; poi di novo si disseccano et invecchiano’ (*Cena* I.558). Bruno also describes the formation of mountains thus:

...come anco da le Alpe e gli Pirenei, che son stati altre volte la testa d’un monte altissimo. La qual, venendo tutta via fracassata dal tempo (che ne produce in altra parte per la vicissitudine de la rinovazione de le parti della terra) forma tante montagne particolari, le quale noi chiamiamo monti. (*Cena* I.517)

All of these processes occur within Nature, ‘la nostra perpetua nutrice e madre’ (*Cena* I.557), which is constantly changing and renewing itself. Interestingly, the quotations above paraphrase passages from Book I of Aristotle’s *Meteorologica*. Indeed, Bruno’s conception of time is so closely anchored to movement that one would be forgiven for questioning his disdain for Aristotle. In the *Cena* Bruno acknowledges that in some respects Aristotle’s descriptions of the Earth in constant mutation resound strongly with his own and that in the *Meteorologica* Aristotle ‘dice per il più e per il principale il vero’ (*Cena* I.557).<sup>91</sup> However, Aristotle attributes the prime cause of this phenomenon to the movement of the sun; as Bruno remarks, ‘dimandate ad Aristotele

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 31. See also Badaloni, p. 33. Badaloni remarks that ageing is attributed to the ancient gods of Mount Olympus in the *Spaccio*. Even Venus is susceptible to bodily changes, as Vulcan is quick to point out: ‘Tu ancora (mia sorella) se non credi ad altri, dimandane al tuo specchio: e vedi come per le rughe che ti sono aggiunte, e per gli solchi che l’aratro del tempo t’imprime ne la faccia, porgi giorno per giorno maggior difficultade al pittore’ (*Spaccio* II.211).

<sup>91</sup> See Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, trans. by H.D.P. Lee (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). Bruno paraphrases the argument to Book I, Chapter XIV: ‘The same districts of the earth are not always wet and dry, nor the same places always sea and land. The reason for this is that different parts of the earth grow old and dry up at different times, while others correspondingly revive and grow wet’ (351 a 19-b 8).

“Onde questo avviene?”; risponde: “Dal sole, e dal moto circolare” (*Cena* I.560). The last pages of the *Cena* are devoted to refuting this theory and instead arguing that ‘questa terra et altri simili corpi si muovano non con una, ma con più differenze di moti’ (*Cena* I. 438).<sup>92</sup> As a result of different internal motors, and not the Sun, Cesarino states that *everything* on Earth undergoes constant change, ‘per l’ingiuria del tempo e vicissitudine de le cose’; ‘per forza della vicissitudine delle cose’ (*Furori* II.646) i.e. because of the vicissitude of all things. Emotions - ‘felicità et infelicità’, movements, materials; ‘con certo ordine’ everything is guaranteed to move from one contrary to the other, ‘questo comporta l’ordine naturale’ (*Furori* II.646).

Bruno’s original interpretation of vicissitude becomes more apparent when we compare his use of the term to that of his European contemporaries. As I have previously stated, vicissitude itself was not a particularly unusual concept in the 16th century; a diverse array of thinkers including Louis Le Roy (1510-1577), Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576) and Girolamo Fracastoro (1478-1553) had already begun to explore the idea of vicissitude from various perspectives. The Italian mathematician Cardano published *De rerum varietate* in 1557, which sought to unravel the *varietas* of the natural world, while Fracastoro’s theories on vicissitude in *Homocentrica* (1538) were read with great interest by Bruno (amongst others).<sup>93</sup> Le Roy’s seminal text *De la vicissitude ou variété des choses en l’universe* was first published in 1575 and was followed by an Italian translation in 1585. It quickly became one of the most widely read history of civilisations in Europe between the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>94</sup> Writing in response to the religious wars waging in his home country of France, Le Roy’s history of humanity is a highly ambitious undertaking which seeks to demonstrate that the principle of change can explain everything.<sup>95</sup> Le Roy’s originality emerges in his attempt to combine human history with the workings of nature; the text explains historical developments and human culture by exploring their relationship to the mutating natural world.<sup>96</sup> *De la vicissitude* ‘takes the form of a general review of physical mutations followed by a more extensive study of various civilizations

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<sup>92</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the exact nature of these motors see Bruno, *Opere italiane*, vol 1, pp. 561-571.

<sup>93</sup> Maria Elena Severini, ‘«Italiani accorti» e «francesi arditi»: Letture e lettori italiani del trattato sulla vicissitudine universale di Loys Le Roy’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 74.2 (2012), pp. 311-324 (pp. 317-318).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>95</sup> Michel Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion. Transforming Shapes in the Renaissance from Da Vinci to Montaigne*, trans. by Nidra Poller (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), ‘7 - The Hazards of Art: Le Roy’.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166-167.

and their genius'.<sup>97</sup> Throughout the text, Le Roy demonstrates a firm belief in the idea that 'life, in any and all realms, would seem to depend on the balance of contraries, unity in diversity, stability in movement'.<sup>98</sup> Naturally, this includes the progress of human history, which in Le Roy's work is subject to the general laws of *variété* and *vicissitude*: 'tel temperament est cause que les choses paravant diverses et differentes, conviennent et accordent ensemble'.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, at first glance Le Roy's understanding of historical change, defined as it is by change and repetition, appears to echo that of Bruno's famous notion of 'light' and 'dark' ages in history. However, despite their similarities, a closer examination of Le Roy's text illustrates Bruno's original use of *vicissitude*, particularly concerning religious orthodoxy.

Le Roy was a devout Catholic humanist, and unlike Bruno, he takes great pains to ensure that his concept of *vicissitude* firmly adheres to a Christian framework. For example, following a tradition set forth by Saint Augustine and Thomas of Aquinas, Le Roy believes that divine providence is ultimately responsible for all of the changes he describes.<sup>100</sup> Providence appears to have control over natural events that might be interpreted as God's justice on Earth such as natural disasters, epidemics, and famine.<sup>101</sup> Le Roy himself states that 'je recognois treshumblement la providence divine estre par dessus, croyant certainement que Dieu tout puissant facteur et gouverneur de ce grand ouvrage excellent'.<sup>102</sup> Bruno offers no such theory and is content to describe physical and historical *vicissitude* without reference to a divine providential plan. However, the most significant difference between Bruno and Le Roy is cosmological. Influenced by Aristotle and Proclus, Le Roy maintains a strict divide between the natural world and the celestial world with its fixed stars and planets: 'Brief tout ce monde inferieur obeïr au superieur et par luy estre gouverné'.<sup>103</sup> Naturally, Le Roy's notion of time mirrors this cosmology - he follows Aristotle in maintaining a division between time on Earth (which is defined by

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Le Roy, Loys, *De la vicissitude ou Variete des choses en l'univers, et concurrence des armes* (Éd. 1575), (Paris: Pierre L'Huillier, 1575), p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Philippe de Lajarte, 'Entre logique naturelle et logique providentielle: les ressorts de l'histoire d'après le traité "De la vicissitude ou variété des choses en l'univers" de Loys Le Roy', *Seizième Siècle*, 10 (2014), pp. 245-260 (p. 251). 'Les lois naturelles sont les "causes secondes" et les "agents subalternes" par la médiation desquels la providence divine exerce son action sur le monde'.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 250. 'C'est en dernier ressort la providence divine qui en détient l'absolute maîtrise et en constitue le principe recteur suprême' (p. 246).

<sup>102</sup> Le Roy, p. ii.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

multiplicity, becoming and change) and eternity (which confines itself to the celestial realm).<sup>104</sup> As we have seen, Bruno's cosmology completely denies the existence of an outer sphere and instead, God resides within the universe itself through the World Soul. As I discuss further in Chapter Three, time and eternity are merely two types of duration and the eternal World Soul actually binds together vicissitudinal objects. Furthermore, vicissitude occurs everywhere in Bruno's universe - including the planets and stars - which takes the concept in a far more radical direction than Le Roy's Christianised version of vicissitude.

Lastly, one must note that a stark difference arises between Bruno and Montaigne when we consider the status of death within Bruno's notion of temporality. Bruno devotes little attention to the significance of death and dying within the Italian dialogues; in the *De la causa* Bruno states explicitly that once one understands vicissitude, there is little reason to fear death - 'non teme la morte ma aspetta la mutazione' (*Causa* I.729). There is no drama or fascination with how exactly this might occur, it merely happens to everyone and everything - death becomes a change of state amongst many other possible states. The next chapter explores how and why this response to death was so unusual within late 16th-century conceptions of time. However, to conclude this section, it appears that for Bruno time engenders a series of changing states - mutability is a key characteristic of all bodies in time. The body cannot travel back or forth in time; rather it is subject to a series of continually changing conditions, of which death happens to be one part. Ironically this process over time constitutes a form of permanence in itself - vicissitude never deviates and thus endures forever: 'Tale continuo mutamento comporta un perenne flusso e allontanarsi degli atomi da e verso di noi'.<sup>105</sup> Vicissitude is the essence of objective time in the Italian dialogues. Moreover, it is a natural phenomenon that affects everyone and everything - human beings have no control over time and instead exist within a process of constant change and renewal.

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<sup>104</sup> 'La definizione del tempo rispecchia quella aristotelica, che rafforza, sul piano teorico, l'associazione delle categorie di temporalità, molteplicità, divenire, movimento e contingenza con la dimensione umana e terrena, in opposizione all'eternità, staticità, necessità e immutabilità della dimensione divina' (Severini, '«Italian accorti» e «francesi arditi»', p. 322).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

## Time and the Mind

### *Time and the mind in the 16th century*

Bodies, matter, the corporeal - devoting such a degree of attention to the existence of bodies in time is arguably one way in which Montaigne and Bruno stand apart from many of their contemporaries. These discussions, which emphasise the corruptible substances that constitute not only the human body but all bodies in time, appear to run counter to the general 16th-century perception of bodily matter as something largely unworthy of proper study to philosophers and theologians. At that time, human beings were generally believed to be composed of a body and a soul. However, from the 14th to the 16th century, the human body was often considered to be an entity of the lowest order.

Despite the advances that were made by anatomists such as Vesalius, the body still did not receive the same attention from theologians and philosophers as the soul. Writing on life and death in the Renaissance, Italian historian Alberto Tenenti has suggested that religious and philosophical thinkers had sneered at the body's weakness ever since the Plague wreaked devastation across Europe in the 14th century.<sup>106</sup> The body was weak and frail compared to the soul and it was only to be regarded as something that human beings would shed in the life to come. A typical view appears in *Predica dell'arte del ben morire* (1496), in which the radical Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) preached to his Christian followers that the body was 'una parte non essenziale dell'uomo'.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, as well as the consequences of the Black Death, the idea that the body was merely a shell housing the soul was enshrined in various Christian and Neoplatonist currents of thought during the Renaissance. As M.A. Screech has demonstrated, these ideas were clearly influenced by Platonism and its amalgamation with Christian doctrine: 'Platonising Christianity gave the body a low place in the union' between body and soul.<sup>108</sup> Plato had attributed the highest status possible to the soul since he believed that the soul did not die. This belief led to the idea that 'a human being was a soul using a body destined to be discarded'; the body was defined in light of its temporary, fleeting nature in comparison to the supposedly eternal entity that it housed.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Alberto Tenenti, *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957), p. 73.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>108</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 114.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

However, not everyone considered the body in such negative terms. Erasmus was one of the few 16th-century thinkers to question the idea of the body as ‘no more than the soul’s tool, dwelling-place or prison’.<sup>110</sup> Montaigne and Bruno have already demonstrated a great deal of interest in bodies, and this interest precludes them from solely defining the body through its relationship to the soul. This refusal to dismiss the body may in fact be influenced by Aristotle, who said that there was ‘a natural union between body and soul’.<sup>111</sup> Ian Maclean also suggests that devoting attention to the body is a reflection of Aristotelian, rather than Platonic, values: ‘Selon Montaigne (qui en ceci suit encore une fois Aristote plutôt que Platon), le corps, c’est le principe d’individuation’.<sup>112</sup> Thus far, bodies are an important and visible marker of human existence in time. However, both Montaigne and Bruno also understand that it is impossible to possess a consciousness of mutation and change to bodies without also possessing an internal capability - frequently referred to as the soul or mind - that can reflect on this process.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, it is obvious that ‘time’ carries much more significance for human beings than simply an empty, natural process from birth to death. In ‘De la Vanité’ (III.IX) Montaigne describes life as ‘un mouvement matériel et corporel’ (III.IX.988). However, there must be a way in which humans become conscious of this movement; Montaigne expresses a desire to live according to this movement - ‘je m’emploie à la servir selon elle’ (III.IX.988) - but how is he able to reflect on this idea in the first place? Bruno already reveals his awareness of this problem at the beginning of the second part of the *Eroici Furori*; after introducing a description of vicissitude in its most basic form, Bruno clearly states that humans cannot stop at contemplating time in this manner. Maricondo observes that despite the certainty of vicissitude, ‘al nostro riguardo sempre, in qualsivoglia stato ordinario, il presente più ne affligge che il passato, et ambi doi insieme manco possono appagarne che il futuro’ (*Furori* II.644). In other words, humans possess a consciousness of past, present and future that renders it impossible to exist in time without any thought for events that have already occurred or might occur again. It seems clear that human understanding of time entails something more than merely a transition

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>112</sup> Maclean, p. 74.

<sup>113</sup> For a detailed discussion of an attempt to define *l’esprit* in the *Essais* see Bernard Sève, *Montaigne. Des règles pour l’esprit* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007). See also Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ‘The Time of the Renaissance’. Wilcox posits an inner and outer time in the early modern period, but his thesis refers to the experience of daily life compared with an awareness of historical time.



from birth, through ageing (or otherwise) to death. How is it that philosophers such as Bruno (or indeed anybody) can perceive a change in matter? How is Montaigne able to compare the current changes in his body to his physical health as a young man? Human beings are not composed solely of an unconscious material body, we are aware of a certain ‘flow’ to time, of changes in our surroundings - we can remember our past or project hopes and fears onto our future.<sup>114</sup>

I believe that a significant aspect of temporality in the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues stems from the relationship between the body in time and the mind, and it is this aspect of time that Chapters One and Two will now discuss. First it will be necessary to justify the use of certain terms in this analysis. In the Introduction, I alluded to a difference between mental perceptions of time and physical time. This notion possesses a long and fascinating history within Western thought.<sup>115</sup> In contemporary European society, we consider the self through a distinct Cartesian mind-body duality. However, for a period roughly spanning from the Late Antique into the 16th century, the mind was traditionally considered to be a part of the soul, and it was often the soul that was believed to be the main counterpart to the body.<sup>116</sup> However, the rigid distinction between body, soul and the mind as the *intellectus* or intellective part of the soul was starting to be questioned even in the late 1500s. Michael Edwards has already highlighted the ambiguity of the terms ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ as they were employed by late Renaissance commentators. While in the Aristotelian tradition ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ were not interchangeable, later translations of the *Physics* and *De anima* ‘referred both to time’s relationship to *anima*, meaning the soul in general, and to *intellectus*, meaning the rational part of that soul, which was peculiar to humans and equated roughly (but not exactly) to the modern term ‘mind’, or ‘human understanding’.<sup>117</sup> Emily Michael discusses the Italian humanist Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1579) and his efforts to prove the immortality of the soul; in doing so Piccolomini described how the human mind ‘has an activity that is wholly

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<sup>114</sup> Conche neatly describes this awareness of time thus: ‘Or, dans la temporalité, ils surgissent et sont pensés ensemble: au-delà de mon passé, en fonction de mon présent, je projette mon avenir’ (p. 16).

<sup>115</sup> For a comprehensive study of the history surrounding issues of time and the mind in Western philosophy, see J.J.A. Mooij, *Time and Mind: the History of a Philosophical Problem*, trans. by P. Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>116</sup> See Robert Pasnau, ‘The Mind-Soul Problem’, in *Mind, Cognition and Representation: The Tradition of Commentaries on Aristotle’s De Anima*, ed. by P. J.J.M. Bakker & J.M.M.H. Thijssen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 3-19; Emily Michael, ‘Renaissance Theories of Body, Soul, and Mind’, in *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, ed. by J.P. Wright & P. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 72-148.

<sup>117</sup> Edwards, p. 18. See also John Sutton, ‘Soul and Body’, in *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by Peter R. Anstey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 285-310. Sutton claims that by the 17th century ‘the proper usage of key terms such as ‘soul’, ‘spirit’ and ‘mind’ was always under negotiation’ (p. 286).

independent of the body - namely, it reflects upon itself'.<sup>118</sup> Throughout this discussion, I use the terms 'mind' and 'soul' in reference to this idea, and when I analyse the mind, I always consider it to be a part of the soul, just as the soul is the entity that contains the *intellectus* or mind.<sup>119</sup>

The idea that human beings become conscious of time through the mind, and consequently that time may not even exist without the mind, has a long history within the development of Western philosophy. Plotinus argues against Aristotle and asserts that time is not movement; nor is it a measure of movement. Instead, he suggests that time is a 'power of the soul'.<sup>120</sup> Plotinus believes the world is contained within the 'mutable succession of time'; it is not a perfect eternal state, which echoes the idea of vicissitude that we have already encountered.<sup>121</sup> However, Plotinus extends this discussion by emphasising the role of what he terms the 'soul' in perceiving time:

Plotinus departs radically from Plato when he argues that time, rather than being an attribute of physical motion, is an attribute of Soul [...]. Time, then, is a psychological reality; and from this correlation of mind and time, what follows logically of course is that without soul (at least in a rudimentary form) there can be no time.<sup>122</sup>

Plotinus is, therefore, the first thinker to suggest that in order to understand time, 'we must turn inward'.<sup>123</sup> A few centuries later, St. Augustine of Hippo (354 AD-430 AD) famously developed this idea through his idea of *distentio animi* or the 'stretching out' of consciousness.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Augustine's thoughts on time are certainly amongst the most well-known definitions of time; he eloquently expresses the difficulty of defining time in Chapter XI of his *Confessions* (c. 400), 'Time and Eternity':

What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know. But I confidently affirm myself to know that if

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<sup>118</sup> Michael, p. 161.

<sup>119</sup> While every effort will be made to highlight when one particular concept is being used in a very traditional context, in the case of Montaigne and Bruno it is often unnecessary to do so since their interest always lies in the capacity of human beings to contemplate time rather than which faculty is responsible for this ability.

<sup>120</sup> Hill, p. 78.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>123</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Antiquity and the Meanings of Time: a Philosophy of Ancient and Modern Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. x.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

nothing passes away, there is no past time, and if nothing arrives, there is no future time, and if nothing existed there would be no present time.<sup>125</sup>

He expresses both the impossibility of articulating what exactly time is, as well as the idea that it is only within ourselves that we can confirm the presence of time - 'I know', 'I affirm myself to know'. In his works on narrative and time, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur suggested that considering time in philosophical terms always leads to irresolvable aporias - Augustine's remarks are an excellent example of this.<sup>126</sup> As Duncan Kennedy explains, 'that is not to rule out, even if we could, the question of the nature of time; however, what we should not expect to come upon is a definitive answer'.<sup>127</sup> Augustine does not search for an exact answer himself; rather he is content to emphasise the subjective nature of time i.e. that time is something humans perceive in their own mind. As he goes on to explain in the same chapter: 'So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time'.<sup>128</sup> It is through the mind, and not the body, that we become conscious of what has happened, is happening and will happen, and Augustine has developed Plotinus' original definition by emphasising that this process occurs within the mind (*animus*), not the soul (*anima*). The three temporal divisions of past, present and future are treated as mental states by Augustine, 'for then they could all exist at one and the same instant within the mind'.<sup>129</sup> He then goes on to say that time is an extension of something 'and that it would be surprising if it were not (*mirum si non*) an extension of the mind'.<sup>130</sup>

Such theories on time and the mind would eventually go on to influence centuries of philosophy on time. Pascal, Leibniz and phenomenological proponents of time-consciousness - such as Husserl and Bergson - would all proceed to draw upon Augustine's observations as a starting point (with Descartes' firm distinction between body and mind acting as another influencing factor).<sup>131</sup> However, the extent to which

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<sup>125</sup> Augustine of Hippo, p. 231.

<sup>126</sup> Kennedy, p. x.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Augustine of Hippo, p. 242.

<sup>129</sup> Sorabji, p. 29.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Hutton highlights Augustine's influence on Pascal in the 17th century. Quoted by Hutton, in the *Opuscles* Pascal remarks: 'Thus, for instance, time is of this kind. Who can define it? And why undertake to do so, since all men understand what one means when speaking of time, without one having to explain it beforehand' (p. 345). Sorabji is unconvinced that Augustine considers his own definition seriously in later works, and it is not wholeheartedly adopted by his immediate successors (p. 30). He continues: 'In modern philosophy, the view that time is somehow dependent on consciousness still reappears in very diverse forms, for example, in Berkeley, in Kant, and in Bergson' (p. 97).

16th-century thinkers accepted these ideas is questionable. There is disagreement amongst critics as to whether the ideas above actually originated in Aristotle's work. Kennedy describes a 'tortuous' attempt at a distinction between so-called inner and outer time in Aristotle's *Physics*, while Edwards argues that it was this same definition, alongside comments found in the *De Anima*, that first prompted discussion about the relationship between time and the soul.<sup>132</sup> In any case, this thesis explores how Montaigne and Bruno confirm a more fractured view of 16th century time than has previously been suggested. While it is not the intention of this thesis to fit either thinker within a narrative in which they whole-heartedly adopt Augustine's definition of time or anticipate Husserl's time-consciousness, Montaigne and Bruno were certainly treating time differently by appearing to reject Aristotle's definition of time as movement in the *Physics*. Instead, they forged their own concerns around an inner and outer awareness of time that had already been explored by thinkers before Aristotelianism dominated the intellectual establishment in the late 16th century.

### *Montaigne, Bruno and the power of the mind*

If the body appears to be a passive entity in time, then the mind is arguably the opposite in nature. There is something inside human beings, within their body, that (as Montaigne concludes in 'Que le Goust') brings with it a consciousness of death, and not only death but a myriad of other things that have existed, exist or will exist. Referring here to the soul, Montaigne identifies the part of our being that is capable of contemplation and reflection outside the *train* and *pli* of the human body.<sup>133</sup> 'Elle [l'ame] est variable en toute sorte de formes, et renga à soy, et à son estat, quel qu'il soit, les sentiments du corps, et tous autres accidents. Pourtant le faut-il estudier et enquerir, et esveiller en elle ses ressors tout-puissants' (I.XIV.266). Although the soul is a part of the body, it is a powerful part of the body, being aware of itself and 'son estat'. Bruno's understanding of human potential is extremely similar. In the *Eroici Furori* he too highlights the ability of the soul to transcend bodily concerns, and also discusses how the virtue of contemplation triggers this phenomenon:

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<sup>132</sup> Edwards, p. 29.

<sup>133</sup> In these extracts, Montaigne and Bruno consider the mind to be a part of the soul. The mind possesses faculties such as intuition and imagination which contribute to the overall 'power' of the soul. In these chapters the soul is mentioned most frequently as the root of human power, but the mind forms an integrated part of this power, and is often referred to directly as *l'esprit* or *la mente* in examples where *l'anima* or *l'ame* may also have been appropriate.

il senso di cose basse è attenuato et annullato dove le potenze superiori sono gagliardamente intente ad oggetto più magnifico et eroico. È tanta la virtù della contemplazione (come nota Iamblico) che accade tal volta non solo che l'anima ripose da gli atti inferiori, ma et oltre lascia il corpo a fatto. (*Furori* II.663)

Drawing upon Neoplatonic distinctions between 'cose basse' and an 'oggetto più magnifico', it appears that the soul may exist within the body but also possesses the ability to leave the body behind. In both cases, humans bring with them not just a body, but also a powerful reflective capability that both Montaigne and Bruno feel individuals should utilise more carefully, focusing attention on cultivating its 'potenze superiori' or 'ressors tout-puissants'.

Of course, taken on its own, this was a relatively common assumption for Renaissance thinkers to make. However, arguably Montaigne and Bruno recognise that these functions have important consequences for human existence in time. Bruno notes in the *Eroici Furori* that humans are able to 'make present' what hasn't even happened yet: 'si fa presente quel che non gli è sopragionto ancora' (*Furori* II.681). One of the sonnets that Cesarino and Maricondo analyse individuates the three traditional temporal distinctions between past, present and future: 'Per quel che feci, faccio et ho da fare/al passat', al presente et al futuro,/mi pento, mi tormento, m'assicuro,/nel perso, nel soffrir, nell'aspettare' (*Furori* II.644-645). A consciousness of not only what is, but also what has been and what will be, can lead someone (in this case a tormented lover) to hope and despair, lost in memories of the past or imagined thoughts about the future. Montaigne attributes the ability to reflect on the ageing body to the mind: 'c'est le privilege de l'esprit de se r'avoir de la vieillesse' (III.V.844). Montaigne's reflections on his changing body in 'De l'experience' are only possible thanks to the mind and its capacity to remember and reflect.

Why then should one confine oneself to letting one's actions be entirely dictated by the body? In 'Que le Goust' and the *Eroici Furori*, this point is emphasised by a consideration of bodily needs. Both thinkers acknowledge that the body experiences certain needs over time, such as hunger, thirst, and sexual desire - Montaigne refers to such impulses above as 'les sentiments du corps' (I.XIV.57). The *Eroici Furori* is a text which explores the possibility of transforming sexual urges and lust into something higher, into a productive quest for divine knowledge. Thus there are many references to the senses and bodily responses to physical beauty. Maricondo explains to Cesarino that an individual risks becoming imprisoned by feelings of lust, and walking around as if the body were 'carcere che tien rinchiusa la sua libertade...catena che tien strette le sue mani,

ceppe che han fissi gli suoi piedi, velo che gli tien abbagliata la vista' (*Furori* II.660). The body can imprison the soul's freedom; one who is tied solely to the bodily senses in this way, allowing their actions to be determined by what they feel in the present, is 'servo, cattivo, invesciato, incatenato, discioperato, saldo e cieco' (*Furori* II.660).<sup>134</sup> As such an animal is 'servo e schiavo del suo corpo' (*Furori* II.660) - a slave to one's body, letting it act without regard for future consequences.

Montaigne echoes these sentiments in the *Essais*. He describes how animals are entirely overwhelmed by their bodily needs: 'Les bestes...laissent aux corps leurs sentiments, libres et naïfs' (I.XIV.58) and that this is evident in the behaviour of all species, 'qu'elles montrent par la semblable application de leurs mouvements' (I.XIV.58).<sup>135</sup> For humans, on the other hand, 'la pointe de nostre esprit' (I.XIV.58) infuses us with choice and the possibility to think and act outside of the whims of the body. Since human beings possess such potentiality within themselves, 'nous sommes emancipez de ses reigles' (I.XIV.58), i.e. the rule of Nature, 'pour nous abandonner à la vagabonde liberté de noz fantasies' (I.XIV.58). The freedom of the mind strangely subverts the natural order of time. Rather than existing passively within time as the body does, the mind actively searches for ways of overcoming the natural order of time.

However, in 'Que le Goust' this degree of cognitive power comes with a mildly sceptical warning regarding mental wellbeing and the risk that utilising such intelligence could potentially sever one's relationship to Nature. In the quotation below, Montaigne makes the case that too much knowledge can also be a bad thing:

A quoy faire la cognoissance des choses, si nous en devenons plus lasches? si nous en perdons le repos et la tranquillité, où nous serions sans cela? et si elle nous rend de pire condition que le pourceau de Pyrrho? L'intelligence qui nous a esté donnée pour nostre plus grand bien, l'employerons nous à nostre ruine; combatans le dessein de nature, et l'universel ordre des choses, qui porte que chacun use de ses utils et moyens pour sa commodité? (I.XIV.55)

Montaigne is keenly aware that the gift of intelligence can transport human beings far outside 'l'universel ordre des choses' - he understands that this can be potentially ruinous as well as enlightening, since we may lose a sense of inner tranquillity and replace it with thoughts that overwhelm us. Bruno is similarly aware of this danger in his

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<sup>134</sup> Ironically in 'Que le Goust des biens et des maux', Montaigne also explores the other side of the argument on sexual desire, questioning why some people despise the most pleasing and useful organs of all i.e. those which 'servent à nous engendrer' (I.XIV.62).

<sup>135</sup> Of course, Montaigne does admit that there may be a degree of happiness to be found in this naivety. In this chapter Montaigne briefly questions whether relinquishing oneself to the senses is actually a blessing and that if human beings were able to live solely according to the body, the torment provoked by the soul might be placated.

observations on the degree of power that human intellect can wield; the soul is ‘esposta alla recepcion de doni superiori’ (*Furori* II.665), it has potential far beyond that of other beings in Nature such as the animals mentioned above. One of the first sonnets that Maricondo and Cesarino analyse describes a typical example of the *tormento* experienced by the lover. As Maricondo points out, it is possible for an individual to transform the desire and passion for the object into divine beauty:

perché son certo che la natura che mi ha messa questa bellezza avanti gli occhi, e mi ha dotato di senso interiore, per cui posso argumentar bellezza più profonda et incomparabilmente maggiore, voglia ch’io da qua basso vegna promosso a l’altezza et eminenza di specie più eccellenti.<sup>136</sup> (*Furori* II.647-648)

The intellectual capabilities of ‘senso interiore’ are fundamental in allowing Montaigne and Bruno to escape the restrictions of the body in time. They both understand quite clearly that there is a conflict between a body that is destined to die, a slave to its wants and needs, and an inner power which inspires the possibility to ascribe more meaning and complexity to time.

Montaigne and Bruno arguably fashion their literary aims around this conflict. At the start of the ‘Isle de Cea’ Montaigne ironically claims that in the *Essais* all he has done has been to indulge idle thoughts, to ‘niaiser et fantastiquer’: ‘Si Philosopher c’est douter, comme ils disent, à plus forte raison niaiser et fantastiquer, comme je fais, doit estre doubter’ (II.III.350). However, with these words he immediately summons the role of the imagination in his writing and underlines his perception of the freedom that the human mind possesses in order to experiment beyond the laws of Nature. In the late 16th century, imagination was considered to be a speculative instrument, used to try and mentally replicate things in order to meditate or philosophise more effectively.<sup>137</sup> Although Montaigne claims to be a mere apprentice, contemplating ‘humaines et vaines contestations’ (II.III.350), the imaginative functions that he asserts here allow him to subvert the notion of time itself, through a radical discussion of suicide (see Chapter Two, ‘Montaigne, suicide and near-death experience’). Bruno demonstrates a similar aim but emphasises that his ultimate goal is to attain divine knowledge. He understands that bodily senses can only provide limited knowledge of the world; the mind is capable of reaching past the surface, perhaps one day even penetrating the divine. Cesarino asks

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<sup>136</sup> Emphasis own.

<sup>137</sup> For an excellent study of the role of the imagination in the 16th and 17th centuries, see John D. Lyons, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Maricondo what he can mean by stating that *la mente* aspires towards something higher. Is it not possible to look up towards the stars instead? Maricondo responds thus:

Non certo, ma procedendo al profondo della mente per cui non fia mistero  
massime aprir gli occhi al cielo, alzar alto le mani, menar i passi al tempio, intonar  
l'orecchie de simulacri, onde più si vegna exaudito: ma venir al più intimo di sé,  
considerando che Dio è vicino, con sé e dentro di sé, più ch'egli medesimo esser  
non si possa [...]. (*Furori* II.658)

An individual can engage their mind towards reaching for higher knowledge, which cannot be seen or heard, but instead exists deep within us. Only the greatness of a soul unconquered, 'la grandezza d'un animo invitto' (*Furori* II.659), is capable of achieving this. Hélène Védérine has previously described the tension arising from such a divide between the freedom of the mind and the existence of the body; the *Eroici Furori* presents the human condition in all of its contradictions as something tied to mortality but also searching for the divine.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, Ordine has stated that Bruno understands the imbalance between a finite being and the possibility of infinite knowledge.<sup>139</sup> Through the original concept of embodied time, I have gone further than previous scholars by demonstrating how bodies themselves are an integral part of how Montaigne and Bruno develop their conceptions of time.

Time in both the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues is primarily understood through the mutation of bodies, corporeal matter, and the certainty of death. These are basic realities of human existence in time (bodies are said to be 'in' time since they cannot appear to escape it). However, for human beings at least, their mind adds another dimension to this relatively simple idea of time, since it exhibits a much greater degree of freedom in time. I have also highlighted potential reasons as to why Montaigne and Bruno understand time in this way, by presenting context relating to how and why they started writing, as well as their very limited interaction with - and in some cases outright criticism of - supposedly traditional 16th-century notions of time. Chapter Two continues this discussion with a distinct focus on the future and how this reveals further tensions between the body in time and the mind in (and out of) time. I hope to show that once again both thinkers are approaching the question of time in new and exciting ways which

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<sup>138</sup> Hélène Védérine, *La conception de la nature chez Giordano Bruno* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), p. 47. '[L]es Fureurs héroïques présentent le drame de la condition humaine, limitée par nature, souffrant des pires contradictions, incapable de trouver le repos et cherchant désespérément à se fondre dans l'Un'. The reference to 'l'Un' symbolises the unity and oneness of the divine spirit. This is a central aspect of Bruno's philosophy; see also Védérine pp. 47-58.

<sup>139</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, p. 135.



often clash with the traditional 16th-century responses to time that are usually identified by modern scholars.

## Chapter Two: Experiments with Time - Rethinking the Future

Towards the end of Chapter One, I proposed that the human mind complicates time due to its ability to move beyond the reality of the present moment. Indeed, one particular result of this capability sees humans drawn to contemplating the future.<sup>1</sup> In the early modern period, many thinkers considered the ability to reflect on the future to be a clear sign of Man's intelligence over other beings. The English poet John Donne (1572-1631) once stated that 'creatures of an inferiour nature, are possest with the present; Man is a future Creature'.<sup>2</sup> The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) also described the future as a specifically human concern; while the 'beasts' possess 'little, or no foresight of the time to come [...] Man observeth how one Event hath been produced by another; and remembreth in them Antecedence and Consequence'.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Hobbes felt that humans were naturally concerned with predicting all manner of possible future events.<sup>4</sup> Unlike animals, human beings were considered to possess a more meaningful consciousness of time that led them to contemplate not only the immediacy of the present but also time that had not yet occurred (albeit with a large degree of uncertainty).

Montaigne and Bruno were also fascinated by the unique ability of human beings to generate a variety of responses to the future. At the beginning of the second part of the *Eroici Furori*, Maricondo explains to his fellow interlocutor Cesarino that despite the relatively simple nature of vicissitude, humans also mentally divide time into past, present and future. As per Bruno's literary convention in the *Furori*, the interlocutors discuss this

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<sup>1</sup> Elements of past time do appear in this chapter, particularly Bruno's self-styled 'renewal' of pre-Socratic thought and Montaigne's response to various classical traditions concerning death. However, while the Renaissance is a period saturated with scholarly criticism concerning its cultural and artistic engagement with the past, this chapter includes examples of past time where they relate directly to the future. For a critical introduction to 'the past' and what this might mean in Renaissance literature, see selected works: David Quint, *Origins and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), Quint includes a chapter on Bruno; Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Zachary Sayre Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011); Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: the Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), Hampton includes a useful chapter on Montaigne.

<sup>2</sup> John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith and Time* (Buffalo, N.Y.: McGill-Queen's University, 1997), p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by W.G. Pogson Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 82. See also Michael Edwards, *Time and Science of the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 202. Hobbes also warns that this may lead to mental distress: 'for, although considering the future is a natural human activity, our ability to do so with any certainty is limited' (p. 202).

<sup>4</sup> Hobbes describes this process thus: 'and, when he [Man] cannot assure himselfe of the true causes of things, (for the causes of good and evill fortune for the most part are invisible), he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth; or trusteth to the Authority of other men, such as he thinks to be his friends, and wiser than himselfe' (p. 82).

idea using a specific image - the statue of the Graeco-Egyptian god Serapis in the temple at Alexandria. Next to Serapis stands a three-headed animal; the central head is a lion, representing present time; to the left is the head of a wolf symbolising the past, while the head on the right-hand side is a dog, which represents the future.<sup>5</sup> As Maricondo states, these three animals represent past, present and future - ‘son dizzioni che significano le tre parti del tempo’ (*Furori* II.644). This delineation brings with it certain complications. Leaving aside the fleeting nature of the present, Maricondo describes how contemplating the past can torment an individual through memories of what has already happened, while the future remains ‘sempre in aspettazione e speranza’ (*Furori* II.644). The future refers to time that neither exists nor has ever existed, and as such it is primarily defined by uncertainty, leaving individuals free to imprint their hopes or fears onto it.

Indeed, uncertainty is arguably one reason as to why humans are drawn to the future; the thought of what *might* occur often leads to a preoccupation with ‘guessing’ future time. However, there is one distinct element of the future which is certain, and which also attracts a large degree of contemplation from human beings: ‘La crainte, le desir, l’esperance nous eslancent vers l’advenir, et nous desrobent le sentiment et la consideration de ce qui est, pour nous amuser à ce qui sera, voire quand nous ne serons plus’ (I.III.15). Montaigne suggests through his use of the verb ‘amuser’ that there is a certain allure to contemplating the future, one that - as Bruno also remarks - feeds on hopes or anxieties over what may occur. However, Montaigne also humorously equates ‘ce qui sera’ directly with ‘quand nous ne serons plus’. Echoing remarks by Lucretius in Book Three of the *De rerum natura*, Montaigne suggests that all thoughts of the future after we die are pointless - we will be dead, so what else is there to think about?<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, death is the only certain event in the future, and as a result, it receives a significant amount of attention from human beings. Unlike animals, humans may well be inquisitive into future events, yet they remain simultaneously (and somewhat cruelly) conscious of the one future event which will end their entire existence in time.

Future time engenders a mixture of different responses from human beings, whether they are thinking about what might happen, or indeed what will happen. Chapter Two explores the mind and time ‘outside’ of the present moment by analysing

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the statue of Serapis, see M.A. Granada, ‘Giordano Bruno et “le banquet de Zeus chez les éthiopiens”: la transformation de la doctrine stoïcienne des exhalaisons humides de la terre’, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 3 (1997), pp. 185-207; Pasquale Sabbatino, *Giordano Bruno e la “mutazione” del Rinascimento* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1993). In Giordano Bruno, *On the Heroic Frenzies*, trans. by Ingrid D. Rowland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), Rowland notes that Bruno probably derived his description of this statue from Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* (p. 377).

<sup>6</sup> See Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. by Alicia Stallings (Penguin: London, 2007), Book Three - ‘The Folly of the Fear of Death’.

how Montaigne and Bruno perceive the future, specifically their radical responses to the one certainty of the future - death.<sup>7</sup> First I outline the 16th-century conceptions of the future that are most often identified by scholars, particularly Christian ideas of the Afterlife and Last Judgement. I suggest that despite these critical trends, which appear to undermine the significance of fear of death during the 16th century, Montaigne and Bruno often approach future time through this very phenomenon. Fear of death serves as a platform for both thinkers to contemplate the future in ways that infuse it with complex new meanings. In the *Essais* the taboo act of suicide questions the body's 'passive' existence within the natural order of time, while Bruno - who develops his own theories on matter and draws largely on pre-Socratic sources - actually denies that the death of the body occurs at all. The last chapter presented time as an uncontrollable force that simply happened to the body; the passage of time was observed and theorised about, but it was also accepted as universal and unchanging. However, a degree of 'experimentation' with time occurs when both thinkers accept the basic foundations of human existence in time - mortality, change, ageing - then attempt to manipulate them anyway. The mind can think 'outside' the bounds of bodily time, moving at will between past, present and future, and reflecting on itself in time. This unique capability allows Montaigne and Bruno to experiment with traditional conceptions of the future.

## Context: 16th-Century Futures

One might assume that conceptions of the future in the 16th century would centre around Aristotle and his definitions of time in the *Physics*. However, many scholars in the field of time studies have repeatedly associated Renaissance ideas of the future - and often time more generally - with the Christian eschatology first detailed in the Introduction, as well as artistic and cultural practices surrounding death.<sup>8</sup> I hope to show that while these trends are well-supported, they are often far from representative of how future time is presented in the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues. J.K. Barret has already highlighted how problematic this fairly narrow approach to 16th and 17th-century 'futures' has become; she claims that 'religious paradigms are repeatedly reinforced as the

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<sup>7</sup> See Introduction, 'Delineations and Limitations' for scholarly work on Renaissance ideas of what 'might' happen e.g. fortune, providence.

<sup>8</sup> See Georges Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain I* (Paris: Plon et Éditions Du Rocher, 1952); Anthony Aveni, *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks and Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

most important component' of early modern future time.<sup>9</sup> Critical studies tend to over-focus on Christian time and apocalyptic end times without acknowledging where Renaissance thinkers have deviated from these models. Many studies also generalise 'Christian time' without reference to the few instances where the Reformation did impact on ideas of end time, i.e. the removal of Purgatory from some branches of Christianity. Here I outline some fundamental aspects of future time in the 16th century, paying careful attention to differentiate between religious sects where appropriate.

The most common early modern understanding of the future that has been continually identified by present-day scholars is rooted in Christian conceptions of time. I have already stated that the Bible delineates a clear beginning to time in the Book of Genesis and that it is equally clear regarding the end of time. This characteristic of time also applied to human beings on an individual level, i.e. a person was born, lived and then their body would die, leaving their soul to travel on to the eternal Afterlife, where it would be sorted into either Heaven or Hell.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the future was also a collective phenomenon. While the Reformation had sent shockwaves through Europe by questioning key aspects of faith such as indulgences and the merits of the saints, Christian sects both old and new still believed in an imminent end time (even if Protestants no longer believed that Purgatory was a possibility after death). The Gospel of Matthew states that the Final Judgement will swiftly follow the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.<sup>11</sup>

In the Renaissance, Christians still believed that the Second Coming - and consequently the end of the world - was imminent. This general attitude did not alter significantly even despite Luther and his schism with Rome; Luther himself believed that 'the age of the Pope' in the 16th century was a direct manifestation of the final age of

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<sup>9</sup> J.K. Barret, *Untold Futures: Time and Literary Culture in Renaissance England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), p. 7. See also pp. 7-8 for a useful discussion concerning the term 'early modern' and its implications for secularisation as an overriding characteristic of modernity.

<sup>10</sup> This has been identified as another continuation from the Middle Ages - see Krzysztof Pomian, *L'ordre du temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). 'Dans la chronosophie chrétienne du haut Moyen Âge, le temps linéaire et irréversible ne caractérise que l'histoire sacrée où l'acteur unique est Dieu, histoire de l'Église: institution visible tout en étant surnaturelle, et dont la durée montre qu'elle est soustraite à l'action destructrice du temps profane' (p. 39). While the vast majority of 16th-century Christians believed in this progression, there were exceptions too. For a different thesis regarding the attitudes of Protestant reformers towards the future, please see Max Engammare, *On Time, Punctuality and Discipline in Early Modern Calvinism*, trans. by Karin Maag (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 25:31-32.

Man.<sup>12</sup> This sense of an impending ‘end’ to all time was particularly acute in the latter half of the 16th century. As I discussed previously, celestial events were interpreted as signs of the world’s end, while the eight Wars of Religion which occurred between 1563 and 1594 were just one example of a bloody conflict which led to widespread pessimism concerning the future of humanity.<sup>13</sup> As a result of these beliefs, time in the 16th century is often referred to as a ‘transient’ phenomenon. This transience is a clear continuation from common attitudes towards time in the Middle Ages; Matoré suggests that in the Medieval period people were prone to view human life as a transitory phenomenon tied to eternity.<sup>14</sup> Much the same can be said for subsequent centuries; the average human being in the 16th century would still have considered their existence to be fleeting in comparison to God’s eternity in the Afterlife.

Furthermore, Christian eschatology is often described as distinctly ‘linear’ in comparison to the so-called ‘Hellenic time’ favoured by various Greek astronomers. Ancient stargazers observed that the motions of heavenly bodies were periodic, and they consequently proposed cyclical, rather than linear, temporal theories ranging from the idea of endlessly recurring worlds to metempsychosis.<sup>15</sup> In stark comparison to these ideas, Christian time looked firmly towards the future:

While the Greeks, fascinated by the past and its endless cyclical repetition, denied the future a meaningful dimension of its own, Hebrews and Christians made the significance of both past and present, conditioned by promise and expectation, dependent for their meaning largely on the future.<sup>16</sup>

People were always mindful of the future and thus viewed their actions in life under the perpetual shadow of the Final Judgement. In a study of attitudes towards death in the Renaissance, Alberto Tenenti argues that from the 14th century onwards, most Christian Europeans of all sects became even more preoccupied with the degeneration of

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen E. Toulmin & June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> See also Giordano Bruno, *Des fureurs héroïques*, ed. by Miguel A. Granada (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999); Dario Tessicini, *I dintorni dell’infinito: Giordano Bruno e l’astronomia del cinquecento* (Pisa: F. Serra, 2007). This raised awkward questions over the validity of Aristotelian cosmology, see Hill, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Georges Matoré, ‘Le temps au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *L’Information Grammaticale*, 32 (1987), pp. 3-8 (p. 5). See also Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), Chapter 6 ‘Montaigne’: ‘For the Christian Middle Ages, “Everything in the world was an effect of something beyond the world; everything in life was a step to something beyond life”’ (p. 205).

<sup>15</sup> Please see Hill, Chapter 6 ‘Chronos and Kairos’; Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), Chapter 12 ‘Fear of death and Endless recurrence’; Pietro Redondi, *Storie del tempo* (Rome: Laterza, 2007), Parte Prima ‘Natura e cultura del tempo’; G.J. Whitrow, *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), ‘The Origins of Time’. See also Chapter Three, ‘Eternity in the 16th century’.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, p. 75.

the body and their possible salvation in the next life. How to live morally in order to reach Heaven became a pressing question (although the general answer was always virtuously i.e., in accordance with Christian doctrine).<sup>17</sup> Arguably any horror surrounding the actual death of the body was undermined since Christians also believed in the soul's eternal existence. Indeed, in light of Christian linear time, the idea of death as annihilation that Richard Sorabji associates with both classical philosophers and a modern, secular society disappears: 'the horror which some people feel just at the thought that they may exist no more'.<sup>18</sup> Christian notions of time certainly inspired fear, but this was a fear stemming largely from the idea that an individual's sins may lead to an eternal Afterlife of fire and brimstone.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, Montaigne's commitment to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul has been seriously thrown into question within the last few decades. Ian Maclean emphasises that Montaigne insists on the importance of the body to the self, an idea which is clearly at odds with Platonism and instead links Montaigne more closely to Aristotelian hylomorphism.<sup>20</sup> In her recent essay 'Montaigne's Soul', Felicity Green demonstrates the true complexity of this issue in the *Essais* with reference to Montaigne's annotations of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Green suggests that for Lucretius, the soul was susceptible to physical disorders and was thus a material entity; Montaigne highlighted this assessment in the margins of his copy.<sup>21</sup> While his rejection of the soul's immortality is not entirely clear, he was certainly interested in theories that were incompatible with Christian theology.

Modern scholars have also displayed a continued interest in 16th-century practices related to death and the future. In the 1500s, Europeans died more often from minor

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<sup>17</sup> Alberto Tenenti, *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957), p. 73. See also Quinones, *Discovery of Time*, Chapter One - 'The Setting' for idleness as a Christian sin and the importance of acting in response to the future. In Malcolm Bull, *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), Bull emphasises the link between impending apocalypse and the need for early modern peoples to repent: 'For them, like their precursors in almost every century of the Christian era, each newsworthy development is a portent of the end giving fresh urgency to the call for repentance' (p. 4).

<sup>18</sup> Sorabji, p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> See also Conche, p. 9; Michel Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion. Transforming Shapes in the Renaissance from Da Vinci to Montaigne*, trans. by Nidra Poller (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 'Du Bartas' for an interesting discussion on Christian time and the early modern philosophies that conflicted with this.

<sup>20</sup> Ian Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> Felicity Green, 'Montaigne's Soul', in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Brian Cummings & Freya Sierhuis (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 99-112 (p. 106). In a B text addition to the 'Apologie' (II.XII), Montaigne includes a quotation from Lucretius 'that makes the inference from the soul's corporeal subjection to its corporeal nature plain' (p. 106). Green also highlights passages from 'De l'age' (I.LVII) in which Montaigne again quotes Lucretius 'to the effect that the powers of the soul decline with the passing of years, alongside those of the body' (p. 107).

illnesses, usually with little warning. Philippe Ariès claims that the early modern period was a time when even the slightest illness could kill somebody within days.<sup>22</sup> In his seminal study of historical attitudes towards death, Ariès argues that it was normal for the living to ‘coexist’ with the dead in the Renaissance due to certain cultural practices surrounding death. For example, the growing fashion amongst European nobility for picking out and choosing grand-looking sepultures, and constructing graves that emulated the dead, assimilated the average 16th-century individual to the physical embodiment of death (such graves would be on display inside churches for all to see). Indeed, Montaigne refers favourably to this practice in the *Essais*; in ‘Nos affections s’emportent au delà de nous’ (I.III) he praises those people who take the time to prepare their sepultures - such preparations allow them to confront fear of death, since they can ‘voir en marbre leur morte contenance’ (I.III.52); in other words they should grow accustomed to looking upon a physical rendering of their death without becoming anxious. Furthermore, poorly-constructed mass graves for peasants were a common sight outside church buildings across Europe:

Le spectacle des morts, dont les os affleuraient à la surface des cimetières, comme le crâne de Hamlet, n’impressionnait pas plus les vivants que l’idée de leur propre mort. Ils étaient aussi familiers avec les morts que familiarisés avec leur mort.<sup>23</sup>

Death and decay were highly visible in everyday life, and modern scholars have used these examples to suggest that in the Renaissance, people were more familiarised (*familiarisés*) to the idea of death.<sup>24</sup> This view is particularly popular amongst art historians; in what has been described as a distinct break with the Medieval period, Renaissance art revealed a direct equivocation of the individual’s future with death. Simona Cohen argues that it was only after the Black Death had wrought deadly havoc across Europe in the 14th century that artists reflected a changing interest in images of the

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<sup>22</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Essais sur l’histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 180. In ‘La mort inversée’ Ariès explains how and why sudden death was more common in the 15th and 16th centuries. For a more recent study on sudden death in the early modern period see Maria Pia Donato, *Sudden Death: Medicine and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, trans. by Valentina Mazzei (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Ariès, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> See Albert Ahmeti, *De la peinture du temps dans les ‘Essais’ de Montaigne* (Paris: Books On Demand, 2014). Ahmeti has suggested a break with time in the Middle Ages, and argues that the Wars of Religion contributed to a sense that ‘la vie humaine est perçue, plus que jamais, dans toute sa fragilité’ (‘Introduction’). If humans in the Middle Ages considered themselves beings that endured, then ‘le chrétien du 16ème siècle “sentait ...le caractère précaire et fugitif de chaque moment vécu”’ (‘Introduction’). This hypothesis still only suggests a heightened awareness of the fragility of life rather than a fearful response to it.



decaying body alongside the living.<sup>25</sup> One example of this phenomenon is the so-called ‘transi-tomb’ in which the decaying corpse of the deceased contrasts with his or her living effigy on the same tomb. Again, funerary practices rendered death an increasingly visible concept and contributed to a heightened association between an individual’s future and the death of the body: ‘the sense of temporal passage was inevitably linked to the idea of death and, whether the approach was mystical, religious or epicurean, the association was ostensible’.<sup>26</sup> Many critics consider future time and death as inevitably becoming confused with each other in the early modern period. Whitrow states that time, rather than death, was often depicted by a particularly morbid iconography involving time the destroyer with its hour-glass, scythe or sickle; in fact the sickle was a popular attribute of both death and time.<sup>27</sup> While philosophical and theological interest in the body was comparatively low compared to the soul, it is clear that the reality of life in the 1500s led to an open acknowledgement of human mortality which was underpinned by certain cultural and funerary practices.

Neither Montaigne nor Bruno appears to seriously engage with either of the critical trends above in their approach to the future. For example, Bruno mentions fear in relation to death more than any other concept; in *De la causa, principio e uno* (1584), the term *morte* appears only 11 times, but 7 of those occurrences relate to fear of death. The other examples discuss death in relation to substance and matter, and once again it is the unconventional nature of his theories that not only leads him away from the religious ideas of the future identified above but often to actively reject them. In the *Essais* a similar tendency occurs, in which Montaigne appears to be much more interested in classical responses to death, and how practical philosophical advice can be in this regard, rather than focusing on theological considerations which - as I will further demonstrate in Chapter Three - he prefers to avoid altogether. Thus religious time bears much less on Montaigne’s discussions of death than one might imagine, despite Montaigne identifying as a member of the Catholic faith.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Simona Cohen, *Transformations of Time and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 85.

<sup>26</sup> Cohen, p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> Whitrow, *Time in History*, p. 132. See also Cohen, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> On Montaigne’s Catholicism see Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. xxx-xxxix; Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Alexandre Micha (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), p. 22; Ullrich Langer, ‘Montaigne’s political and religious context’ in *Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. by Ullrich Langer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 9-26. Kenny briefly mentions the issue of Catholicism in the *Essais* as ‘the religious question upon which the *Essais* remains elusive’ (p. 247).

Why were they less influenced by the cultural and religious practices of their age in this respect? Neil Kenny is one of the few recent critics to elucidate the true complexities of attitudes towards the future in the early modern period, with a more nuanced view in *Death and Tenses: Posthumous Presence in Early Modern France* (2015).<sup>29</sup> In his chapter on Montaigne, Kenny acknowledges that many different conceptions of time were floating about that were not solely attached to theological concerns, due to ‘a war-torn, late humanist culture that was saturated in various Christian and non-Christian understandings of posthumous survival’.<sup>30</sup> Here Kenny is discussing ideas of the future centring around posthumous existence and he alludes to a growing ‘experimentation’ with such ideas. Similarly, J.K. Barret responds to what she considers to be the same conventional descriptions of 16th-century futures by claiming that early modern literature ‘regularly and notoriously manipulates linear time’.<sup>31</sup> In light of these recent views, I wish to examine experimental conceptions of the future that were closely linked both to Bruno’s unique philosophy and Montaigne’s attempts to write himself over time.

This section examines a range of source material from both authors. Even a cursory glance at Bruno’s references to fear of death reveal a continual interest in this phenomenon. It is mentioned frequently across many of the Italian dialogues and beyond; thus I examine passages from several of his works including *De la causa, De l’infinito, universo e mondi* (1584) and *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* (1584). The first two texts are particularly well-known for developing Bruno’s monism; in both *De la causa* and particularly *De l’infinito*, Bruno expounds the physical and cosmological structure of the infinite universe that was introduced in the *Cena de le Ceneri*. Throughout these texts, Bruno continues his invective against Aristotle and instead adapts pre-Socratic theories that he claims to have ‘renewed’ with his philosophy. The idea of renewal also features heavily in the *Spaccio* with Bruno’s criticism of religion and his desire to restore older, i.e. pre-Christian values onto civilisation.<sup>32</sup> It would appear that the overall aim of these texts has little to do with future time, or fear of death for that matter. Yet Bruno’s conception

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<sup>29</sup> Neil Kenny, *Death and Tenses: Posthumous Presence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). See also Françoise Joukovsky, *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), p. 123 for Joukovsky’s claims regarding the contradictory views on death in Montaigne’s age.

<sup>30</sup> Neil Kenny, *An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century French Literature and Thought: Other Times, Other Places* (London: Duckworth, 2008), p. 231.

<sup>31</sup> Barret, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, 2 vols, ed. by Nuccio Ordine (Turin, UTET 2002). ‘Le dottrine di Aristotele e i principi del cristianesimo hanno spezzato il rapporto autentico tra l’umanità e la vita, tra gli esseri viventi e la natura. Un rapporto, invece, che era stato salvaguardato dalle teorie presocratiche, dalla “antiqua vera filosofia” (p. 75).

of time is heavily engrained within his philosophy on the unity of matter, and as a result, he envisions a radically different future laid out before him. Montaigne's method of drawing on a mixture of preferred classical sources, historical examples, and personal experience yields fascinating experiments with the natural order of time attributed to the body. In this chapter, Montaigne the Catholic is conspicuously absent, and instead this thesis concerns itself with the conclusions that he reaches through his memories ('De l'exercitation' II.VI) and his assessment of classical sources. Employing a range of excerpts from the first volume ('De la peur' (I.XVIII), 'Que philosopher' (I.XX)) to the third volume ('De la Phisionomie' (III.XII)), I show how fear of death, and subsequently the future, acquire new meanings that do not correlate to Christian conceptions of time and instead engage further with the natural order of time.<sup>33</sup>

## Rethinking the Future

### *Bruno, death and the future*

In Chapter One I stated that death holds little interest for Bruno. And yet, at the same time, he is clearly fascinated by the anxiety that death inspires. Rather than being an insignificant response to the future, across Bruno's works 'il cieco spavento de la morte' (*Spaccio* II.386) is in fact a major time-related concern. Death is one of two elements in the future that one would fear in a sonnet at the start of *De l'infinito*, a text which repeatedly links fear with death: 'E chi mi impenna, e chi mi scald'il core?/Chi non mi fa temer fortuna o morte?' (*Infinito* II.31).<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in nearly every instance in which death appears in the *Spaccio*, words that express terror, horror or fear are also present. Mercurio worries that to human beings, he and the other gods may become 'più abominati che la morte' (*Spaccio* II.238); amongst the constellations, 'la Lepre' (the hare) is included as 'tipo del timore per la Contemplazion de la morte' (*Spaccio* II.385-386). Bruno blurs the division between the two concepts when he lists death alongside three emotions related to fear and torment: 'quai sono Oppressione, Usurpazione, Dolore, Tormento, Timore e Morte' (*Spaccio* II.319) - death is presented as an emotion and not a significant temporal state in its own right, an approach that already begins to undermine

<sup>33</sup> In this chapter I mention 'Christian time' on several occasions despite having discussed the fractured state of Christianity in the late 16th century. In doing so I refer back to the discussion in 'Context: 16th Century Futures' concerning Christian notions of end-time, which were not as polemical in the late 1500s. However, I will be careful to differentiate between the views of 16th-century branches of Christianity where appropriate.

<sup>34</sup> See also Bruno, *Opere Italiane*. Jean Seidengart notes that sections of the sonnet are partially repeated in the *Eroici Furori* and 'i concetti che esprime saranno ripresi in *De immenso*' (p. 31).

the reality of death itself. Rather than time and death becoming confused in the 16th century, for Bruno it is fear and death that have overlapped. Furthermore, the interlocutor Saulino states that fear of death or the ‘importuno terror de la morte’ afflicts human beings as soon they have ‘uso di sensi’, i.e. as soon as humans possess a consciousness of the future then death tyrannises ‘il spirto de gli animanti’.

This mental anguish is only exacerbated by our complete lack of control over time. The second verse of the *De l’infinito* sonnet above refers to time and the chronology into which humans divide it: ‘L’etadi, gli anni, i mesi, i giorni e l’ore’ are the ‘figlie et armi del tempo’ (*Infinito* II.31). Time is ‘quella corte/a cui né ferro né diamante è forte’ (*Infinito* II.31) - in other words, humans are unable to control it and can only measure its passing in years, hours, and months. For obvious reasons, the natural order of time dictates that fear of death is even more acute amongst the elderly, who have already observed the passing of many such years. In a passage from the *Spaccio*, Saulino directly equates ‘la matura etade’ with feelings of ‘tristizia e dolor’; admittedly time and death are bound together more closely when Jove express concerns about what he does with the rest of his life before old age - and by extension, death - takes him away: ‘la senettute e la morte prima mi tolga’ (*Spaccio* II.312); ‘la vecchiaia e morte’ (*Spaccio* II.312).<sup>35</sup> Bruno is interested in fear of death as a response to the future, but he emphasises its connection to our inability to halt the ‘figlie et armi del tempo’ rather than portraying it as an emotion inherently related to Christian ideas of fire and brimstone in the Afterlife.

At first glance, these observations are not particularly radical. Yet Bruno persistently returns to fear of death in his works, and he arguably does so in order to strengthen the validity of his unique philosophy. In particular, Bruno is extremely concerned about *why* people fear death. He portrays this response to the future as being widespread because he believes that it exists in the mind of anyone who does not follow the ‘unica vera filosofia’, i.e. his philosophy. Bruno strengthens the validity of his theories by depicting himself as free from anxiety over death, while continually linking fear of death to *anyone* who does not accept his philosophical stance regarding substance, form and matter. In fact, it will become clear that death holds little interest for Bruno because he flatly denies that it affects either body or soul. In some cases, he aggressively rejects more conventional 16th-century conceptions of time as suitable remedies for fear of death and instead draws on a combination of pre-Socratic sources, his theories on vicissitude

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<sup>35</sup> The reference to ‘la senettute’ draws on the original Latin name of Cicero’s text *De senectute* (On Old Age).

and even Nature itself in order to convey a very different idea of the future which destroys the entire concept of death.

Contrary to the critical trends discussed in 'Context: 16th-Century Futures', Bruno proposes that people are only fearful of the future either because they believe in a flawed philosophy or an equally flawed religion (or both). Bruno's curiosity with fear of death stems directly from his theories concerning matter, which run counter to 16th-century Scholasticism; in turn, this curiosity becomes a way of separating Bruno's 'true' philosophy from the views of those who follow Aristotle. Bruno devotes a fairly short yet illuminating chapter to discussing death in one of his Latin works - although it was published a couple of years after the Italian dialogues, it is a useful starting point since it gathers together many of his comments on fear of death across the Italian works into one place. The third chapter of the first of five books comprising *De triplici minimo et mensura* is entitled 'Da quanto stiamo per dire, si potrà concludere che la morte non riguarda la sostanza corporea e tanto meno l'anima'.<sup>36</sup> As we saw briefly in Chapter One, according to Bruno's philosophy concerning substance, matter and form, death is not something that affects the soul. In *De triplici minimo* he goes even further and argues that it does not pertain to the 'sostanza corporea' of the body either. Furthermore, the continued existence of the soul is not due to a Platonising-Christian belief in the immortality of the soul, rather Bruno attributes this phenomenon to vicissitude and its constant renewal of matter. He states that matter never truly 'dies', it merely mutates into a different form: 'la stessa materia...muta variamente nel tempo'.<sup>37</sup> Thus writing on fear of death, Bruno belittles it:

Se considererai ciò che è composto di parti come espressione della vera sostanza, allora stoltamente temerai le minacce della morte e il fato, ignorando le sante parole del filosofo di Samo, tremerai dinanzi alle parole degli sciocchi e i deliri del volgo ti incuteranno un fatale terrore.<sup>38</sup>

Bruno holds Aristotle's theory of matter - beholden by the Scholastics of his age - to account for the 'fatale terrore' that death inspires since it proposes that substance is corruptible. As Dario Tessicini and other Bruno scholars have previously identified, it is this 'credenza nella corruzione delle sostanza particolari' that Bruno blames for fear of death; if substance is 'ciò che è composto di parti' then of course it will inspire fear, since

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<sup>36</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Opere Latine*, trans. by Carlo Monti (Turin: UTET, 2013), p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

all of the parts of substance will eventually corrode and nothing will be left over.<sup>39</sup> Instead, in the Latin works Bruno delineates his version of atomism in more detail.<sup>40</sup> The ‘minimo’ of the work’s title - *De triplici minimo et mensura* - is a philosophical term roughly equivalent to what modern science would refer to as an atom i.e., it is the smallest part of substance, and one that cannot be destroyed: ‘è una sostanza che il potere della natura non può affatto disgregare’.<sup>41</sup> Therefore one can never really be said to have ‘died’ in the broader Christian sense since both body and soul continue to be renewed.

Although ancient atomic theories were not unheard of in the 16th century, Bruno’s ‘atomistic conception of matter’ was a radical and direct response to Christian and Aristotelian traditions.<sup>42</sup> Note that *stoltamente* the reader will fear the ‘minacce della morte’ if they continue to adhere to Scholastic philosophy, i.e. the ‘parole degli sciocchi’ - such beliefs will only continue to provoke ‘fatale terrore’ at the thought of death. On the other hand, Bruno deliberately separates himself not only from the Scholastics but also his readers by addressing them directly using ‘tu’ forms of the verb, e.g. ‘considererai’, ‘tremerai’. He is naturally eager to distance himself from fear of death since it is a symptom of people who do not follow the ‘vera filosofia’, and as such his use of pronouns and verb forms is deliberately divisive. Indeed, throughout this section, it will be noted that Bruno continuously employs the third-person plural form of the verb, i.e. ‘temeno’, ‘se fanno’, ‘prendeno’. The idea that it is those people who do not follow the ‘true philosophy’ who suffer from fear of death appears again in *De l’infinito*: ‘...e massime temeno il morire coloro, che non han lume di filosofia vera, e non apprendeno altro esser ch’il presente, e pensano che non possa succedere altro che appartegna a essi’ (*Infinito* II. 125). Ironically, Bruno suggests here that those who fear death are too focused on the reality of the present moment and possess no real understanding about what happens after body and soul undergo vicissitude.

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<sup>39</sup> Dario Tessicini, “Attoniti [...] quia sic Stagyrita docebat”. Bruno in polemica con Digges’, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 5.2 (1999), pp. 521-526 (p. 521). See also Paul-Henri Michel, *La cosmologie de Giordano Bruno* (Paris: Hermann, 1962), Chapter 5 ‘La matière’ and Giordano Bruno, *De la cause, du principe et de l’un*, ed. by Giovanni Aquilecchia, Thomas Leinkauf & Zaira Sorrenti, trans. by Luc Hersant (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2016), ‘Introduction’.

<sup>40</sup> Please see Hilary Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter 3 ‘Bruno and the new atomism’; Stephen Clucas, “The Infinite Variety of Formes and Magnitudes”: 16th- and 17th-Century English Corpuscular Philosophy and Aristotelian Theories of Matter and Form’, *Early Science and Medicine*, 2.3 (1997), pp. 251-271 (pp. 253-254); Jeanneret, ‘Du Bartas’ on French Renaissance atomism; Enrico Giannetto, ‘Giordano Bruno and the Relativity of Time’, in *Turning Traditions Upside Down: Rethinking Giordano Bruno’s Enlightenment*, ed. by Henning Hufnagel & Anne Eusterschulte (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 121-130.

<sup>41</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Opere Latine*, trans. by Carlo Monti (Turin: UTET, 2013), p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, p. 70.

In the *Spaccio*, an allegorical text which was intended as a polemic against Protestantism, Bruno repeats his conviction that fear of death is linked to the wrong kind of thought, this time regarding religion and faith. '[...] Il cieco Spavento de la morte' is a 'falsa sospettazione' that 'la stolta Fede et orba Credulitate parturisce, nutrisce et allieva...' (*Spaccio* II.386). Again 'spavento de la morte' is a problem that other people suffer from, and again Bruno labels it foolish. However, in this example Bruno accuses 'la stolta Fede' of feeding off this fear. Fear of death is 'blind' and can't see ahead ('cieco' is an adjective Bruno often uses to talk about not seeing the truth). In a direct attack on religious faith, Bruno criticises wider Christian conceptions of time as 'falsi pensieri', holding them directly responsible for the idea of death as something to be feared. Instead, drawing heavily on passages from Averroes' commentaries of Aristotle's *Physics*, Bruno aligns the truth of nature, not the teachings of religion, with moral goodness; the road to human perfection and self-improvement 'consiste nella conformità della natura superiore e non errante' (*Spaccio* II.386). His criticism is also apparent in the *epistola dedicatoria* of the *De l'infinito*, with an overtly sacrilegious passage that completely dismantles the accepted eschatological timeline in place in the 16th century:

Non temiamo che quello che è accumulato in questo mondo, per la vehemenza di qualche spirto errante, o per il degno di qualche fulmineo Giove, si disperga fuor di questa tomba o cupola del cielo, o si scuota et effluisca come in polvere fuor di questo manto stellifero. (*Infinito* II.26)

The 'cupola del cielo' and 'manto stellifero' clearly refer to the closed, finite Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology of the 16th century. Of course, Bruno's theories completely dismantled this dated system, which relies on the existence of a supercelestial realm.<sup>43</sup> Bruno discards this cosmology and states that human beings should not be concerned about their actions 'in questo mondo', because there is no heavenly existence outside of the 'cupola del cielo' - therefore it is impossible for any soul or 'spirto errante' to survive death and transport itself outside 'questo manto stellifero', since within Bruno's universe 'non sono fini, termini, margini, muraglia' (*Infinito* II.26). He demonstrates here that as well as a spatially infinite universe or 'infinito spacio', his universe is temporally infinite too; in this passage, Bruno's cosmology more closely resembles the opinions of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, 'che vogliono tutto per infinito rinovarsi e restituirsi' (*Infinito* II.26). In both spatial and temporal terms, Bruno's

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<sup>43</sup> Sergius Koder, 'Timid Mathematicians vs. Daring Explorers of the Infinite Cosmos: Giordano Bruno, Literary Self-Fashioning and *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*', in *The Making of Copernicus: Early Modern Transformations of the Scientist and his Science*, ed. by Wolfgang Neuber, Thomas Rahn & Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 229-250 (p. 238).

‘vera filosofia’ postulates an infinite universe, and this lies in complete opposition to acceptable religious doctrine.<sup>44</sup> In his spatially infinite universe, there is simply no room either physically or temporally for souls to travel to a heavenly Afterlife beyond the firmament. This idea runs counter to the general perception that people were imminently going to be judged on their actions in life and sorted into Heaven or Hell. Instead, the infinite universe is the realisation of all possible forms in both time and space. Since each part of the universe is subject to the vicissitude of forms, no part of it ‘dies’ and then transcends this process; instead, once matter dissolves it becomes part of another substance, and so on forever.

Bruno attacks Christian ideas of time, particularly the nature of death and the Afterlife, and instead he draws inspiration from pre-Christian sources for his radical reimagining of the future. As well as his interest in atomism and the philosophy of Lucretius,<sup>45</sup> the ‘filosofo di Samo’ from the quotation on page seventy-five above is ostensibly a reference to Pythagoras of Samos (c.570 BC - c.500 BC), a source that Bruno will return to repeatedly when discussing fear of death.<sup>46</sup> In the Renaissance, Pythagoras was part of ‘an ancient philosophical tradition alternative to Aristotle’ that embraced theories on the earth’s movement and heliocentrism.<sup>47</sup> Bruno makes several references to Pythagoras in the Italian dialogues; he cites the Greek philosopher in several passages from *De la causa* that discuss Pythagoras’ views on the transmigration of the soul into different bodies.<sup>48</sup> Bruno often refers to a passage from Book XV of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* which examines Pythagoras’ teachings on metempsychosis; Numa Pompilius, a legendary King of Rome, learns about the nature of the universe directly from the great philosopher. I have included the most relevant passage in full:

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<sup>44</sup> Tessicini, *I dintorni dell’infinito*, p. 144. See also Pasquale Sabbatino, *A l’infinito m’ergo: Giordano Bruno e il volo del moderno Ulisse* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2004), ‘Il moderno Ulisse e la nascita de Amleto’; Eugenio Canone, ‘Bruno e la fine di tutte le cose. Sui motivi apocalittici dello “Spaccio”’, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 2 (2004), pp. 269-282.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Lucretius announces the scope and aims of his poem: an account of the true “nature of things”, according to Epicurean principles, capable of freeing human beings from the fear of death and of everlasting punishment. It is the common man’s ignorance concerning the soul, and specifically its materiality and mortality, that sustains “the superstitions and threatenings of priests” (religionibus atque minis...uatum)’ (Green, p. 102).

<sup>46</sup> See Tessicini, *I dintorni dell’infinito*, pp. 24-42; Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964) (p. 146, p. 185 & p. 350); Michael J.B. Allen, ‘Pythagoras in the Early Renaissance’, in *A History of Pythagoreanism*, ed. by Carl A. Huffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 435-453.

<sup>47</sup> Dario Tessicini, ‘Giordano Bruno on Copernican Harmony, Circular Uniformity and Spiral Motions’, in *Unifying Heaven and Earth: Essays in the History of Early Modern Cosmology*, ed. by Miguel A. Granada, Patrick J. Boner & Dario Tessicini (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2016), p. 145.

<sup>48</sup> See also Sorabji, p. 189.



O people stunned with the icy terror of dying,/why do you fear the Styx? Why are you frightened of phantoms/and names that mean nothing, the empty blabber of poets,/foolish hobgoblins of a world that never existed?/Here is what happens after you die: your body,/whether consumed on the pyre or slowly decaying,/suffers no evil; souls cannot perish, and always,/on leaving their prior abodes, they come to new ones,/living on, dwelling again in receptive bodies. [...] Everything changes and nothing can die, for the spirit/wanders wherever it wishes to, now here and now there, living with whatever body it chooses, and passing/from feral to human and then back from human to feral,/and at no time does it ever cease its existence,/and just as soft wax easily takes on a new shape,/unable to stay as it was or keep the same form,/and yet is still wax, I preach that the spirit is always/the same even though it migrates to various bodies.<sup>49</sup>

The transmigration of souls was a distinctly cyclical phenomenon in which individual souls continuously passed from body to body. Bruno adapts metempsychosis described here to his atomic theories, and the influence on his philosophy of substance, form, and matter in the Italian dialogues is evident. Drawing on this passage from Ovid (and by extension, Pythagoras), the soul is arguably the substance and the body is just one of many ‘different forms’. Like many of his peers in the Renaissance, Bruno believes that the soul does not die - and yet in this case, neither does the body.<sup>50</sup> Both soul and body exist in an infinite universe, undergoing an infinite number of different forms. The death of a human being - previously considered to be the one ‘certainty’ of the future - is impossible. Instead ‘everything changes, nothing dies’ - death is not possible because substance (consisting of the smallest part, the *minimo*) never dies: ‘e però né per sé né per accidente alcuno può esser detta morire; perché morte non è altro che divorzio de parti congiunte nel posto’ (*Causa* II.181). Pythagoras believed that all matter flowed endlessly; this is the essence of Bruno’s *vicissitudine*, and it is only from ‘la cognizion de la vera forma’ (*Causa* I.599) i.e. knowledge of this philosophy that one may infer ‘la vera notizia di quel che sia vita, e di quel che sia morte’ (*Causa* I.599).

Bruno considers fear of death to be a symptom afflicting anyone who does not believe in the truth of what Pythagoras and by extension, he himself teaches about the cyclical nature of time. Bruno calmly accepts his transience because he flatly denies that death exists. A passage from *De l’infinito* reads thus:

Ma mentre consideramo più profondamente l’essere e sustanza di quello in cui siamo immutabili, troveremo non esser morte, non solo per noi, ma né per veruna

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<sup>49</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Charles Martin (London: W.W. Norton, 2010), pp. 526-527.

<sup>50</sup> See Quint, *Origins and Originality*, Chapter 5 ‘The Jordan Comes to England’ - Bruno goes against the ‘orthodox tenet that the soul has only one body’ (p. 140); for early modern context regarding metempsychosis see Malvern van Wyk Smith, ‘John Donne’s Metempsychosis’, *The Review of English Studies*, 24 (1973), pp. 141-152.

sustanza: mentre nulla sostanzialmente si sminuisce, ma tutto per infinito spacio discorrendo cangia il volto. (*Infinito* II.26)

Moving from technical language to the more poetic, he plainly states that instead of dying, ‘tutto...cangia il volto.’ For Bruno, death is not a stepping stone that marks the soul’s transition into an uncertain Afterlife. Bruno believes that he knows what death entails - it is just another facet of mutation. This process will continue ‘per infinito spacio’ and thus - one must assume - for an infinite amount of time. Concerning vicissitude, Bruno says in the *Cena* that when we say something dies, ‘non doviamo tanto credere quella morire, quanto che la si muta, e cessa quella accidentale composizione e concordia, rimanendono le cose che quella incorreno, sempre immortali’ (*Cena* I.513). This process is the essence of what Granada has also identified as Bruno’s infinite duration - although the separate parts of a whole are finite, the process that occurs to each separate part makes up a self-perpetuating whole.

Consequently, human beings are not only part of an infinite universe but also an infinitely enduring universe; they exist as part of something much bigger, not only spatially but temporally too. This leaves little room for elements of Christian time to thrive, since there is no room for the absolute death of the body and the soul’s journey to the Afterlife.<sup>51</sup> If one invests in Bruno’s philosophy, then the future ahead is far less ominous - the cyclical nature of time that emerges here is one of repetition and renewal which ensures the continued survival of both the material body and the soul.

Furthermore, the Nolan reinforces the supposed truth of this philosophy by aligning it with the truth of Nature. In *De la causa*, Teofilo is criticising the Peripatetic mode of considering substance and matters. Once more, Bruno employs his literary mouthpiece Teofilo to argue that those who follow this philosophy are (unsurprisingly) scared of death:

onde non è maraviglia se fanno tanto, e prendeno tanto spavento per la morte e dissoluzione: come quelli a’ quali è imminente la iattura [disgrazia, danno] de

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<sup>51</sup> M.A. Granada, ‘El concepto de tiempo en Bruno: tiempos cósmicos y eternidad’, in *La filosofía di Giordano Bruno: Problemi ermeneutici e storiografici*, ed. by Eugenio Canone (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2003), pp. 85-113. ‘In this sense, we may say that in Bruno’s works we are witnessing a conscious “de-Christianisation and de-eschatologisation of the universe” which is achieved by establishing its eternity’ (p. 88). Translation own. Original Spanish quotation as follows: ‘En este sentido, creemos que se puede decir que en Bruno asistimos a una consciente “descristianización y deseschatologización del universo” llevada a cabo mediante el establecimiento de la eternidad del mismo’. See also Granada, *Fureurs héroïques*: ‘Par la suite le *De la causa, principio e uno* établissait le fondement ontologique de la cosmologie infinitiste de Bruno: l’unité de la substance infinie, qui permet de rejeter comme une illusion infantile la crainte de la mort qui - à partir de la conception aristotélicienne erronée de la substance comme composé hylémorphique individuel, sujet de la génération et de la corruption - avait servi de base à l’erreur chrétienne, au triomphe historique de la foi dans le Christ comme voi unique et garant unique du triomphe sur la mort’ (pp. xlvi-xlix).

l'essere. Contra la qual pazzia crida ad alte voci la natura, assicurandoci che non gli corpi né l'anima deve temer la morte, perché tanto la materia quanto la forma sono principii constantissimi. (*Causa* I.664-665)

Bruno now positions his philosophy on the side of Nature, which he believes is crying out - 'crida ad alte voci' - the same truth as Pythagoras' teachings, i.e. that neither the body nor the soul can truly be said to die. Now even Nature is pitted against the *pazzia* of a philosophy which denies that matter and form are 'principii constantissimi'. In the *Cena de le Ceneri* Nundinio, one of the Oxford scholars, is scolded by the Nolan for laughing at these ideas. The idea that body and soul do not die at all but rather 'change form' is ridiculous to Christian-Scholastic thinkers. The *Cena's* dialogical form allows Bruno to present an opinion he disagrees with before the other characters argue against this position and undermine its credibility. In this case, Nundinio's response appears to confirm that precise notions of future time were firmly embedded in 16th-century culture, shaped by the Christian idea of the soul's survival compared to the destruction of the body. On the other hand Smitho, the Nolan's ally, twice refers to the findings of this dialogue as 'secreti della natura' that were previously held under lock and key, emphasising the innovation of Bruno's theories and their break with tradition.

In a twist of irony, Bruno's original philosophy is responsible for restoring the truth of Nature. Nuccio Ordine claims that Bruno's achievement across the *De la causa* was to promote a monism which liberated matter from form.<sup>52</sup> He then argues that this change to the notion of matter is a central tenet of Brunian views of Nature: 'Il *De la causa*, insomma, punta soprattutto a restituire alla "materia" una dignità che le era stata negata da Aristotele'.<sup>53</sup> Whereas the Scholastics believe that all matter is made up of corruptible parts, Bruno puts forward an atomistic theory that emphasises the infinite duration of matter. I believe that this has important repercussions for Bruno's understanding of the future. Bruno - influenced by Pythagoras - throws into question whether the death of the body and the soul is even real while rejecting Christian linear time in favour of a vicissitudinal time that aligns with metempsychosis and consequently has more in common with so-called Hellenic time.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ordine, p. 77. '[Bruno] arriva a ridurre il dualismo in monismo, liberando la materia dalla schiavitù della forma' (p. 77).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed examination of Bruno's adoption of Pythagoras see Hilary Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), Chapter One, "'The Pythagorean School and Our Own': Bruno and the Philosopher from Samos".

However, the Bible remains a source of inspiration for Bruno despite his refutation of Scholastic philosophy and Christian theology. In particular, Bruno's cyclical conception of time is cemented by another repeated reference - this time to a Biblical verse. The verse appears in Ecclesiastes, and Bruno attributes it to Solomon, 'che dice non esser cosa nova sotto il sole: ma quel che è fu già prima' (*Causa* I.729).<sup>55</sup> The full Bible verse reads: 'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Much like his appropriation of Ovid, this is a verse that clearly influenced Bruno's perception of time; in fact, in the *De la causa*, Bruno repeats this dictum directly after quoting from chapter XV of the *Metamorphoses*: 'Conforme a questo mi par che dica il sapientissimo stimato tra gli Ebrei Salomone: "Quid est quod est? ipsum quod fuit. Quid est quod fuit? ipsum quod est. Nihil sub sole novum"' (*Causa* I.665). However, although it is a Biblical phrase, unlike traditional conceptions of Christian time it is a distinctly cyclical phenomenon, more akin to Hellenic ideas of time.<sup>56</sup> Nothing can be new since everything has already been before, the same substance reforms an endless amount of times. Nicola Badaloni points out that within this idea of time the present will also be the future: 'mentre lo *erit* si riferisce ora a un presente che sarà anche futuro'.<sup>57</sup> I would argue further and suggest that within the reality of infinite duration, all of the traditional tenses of past, present and future will eventually become one another. Bruno finds a great degree of comfort in this idea: 'cossì tutto concorre in una perfetta unità' (*Causa* I.730), there is a neatness to time, a rhythm that cannot be disturbed: 'questa unità è sola e stabile, e sempre rimane' (*Causa* I.730). Instead of fire and brimstone, life after death is repetitive and thus familiar.<sup>58</sup> Relating to the discussion from Chapter One, linear Christian time has arguably been replaced by Bruno's image of the 'ruota del tempo' spinning endlessly on its axis.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See Nicola Badaloni, 'Sulla struttura del tempo in Giordano Bruno', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 3.1 (1997), pp. 11-45. Badaloni states that Bruno confusedly attributes the 'nihil sub sole novum' to both the book of Solomon and also Pythagoras throughout his works.

<sup>56</sup> See the discussion of the *ciclo del tempo* in Chapter One, 'Bruno, vicissitude and death'; also Sorabji, pp. 182-183 for pre-Socratic (including Pythagorean) views on cyclical time and Ordine, p. 75 for a discussion of Bruno's renewal of pre-Socratic sources.

<sup>57</sup> Badaloni, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> 'Questa trasfigurazione del passo scritturale spiega, perché il Nolano tragga dal motto la conseguenza che non si debba temere la morte, intesa come futuro ultrasensibile, raccordandosi così al classico tema, presentato immediatamente prima da Teofilo, della irragionevolezza della paura della morte' (Ibid., p. 12).

<sup>59</sup> '...dove il moto concorre con la quiete, atteso che nel moto orbicolare sopra il proprio asse e circa il proprio mezzo si comprende la quiete e fermezza secondo il moto retto: over quiete del tutto, e moto secondo le parti; e da le parti che si muovono in circolo si apprendono due differenze di lazione, in quanto che successivamente altre parti montano alla sommità, altre dalla sommità scendono al basso; altre ottengono le differenze medianti, altre tengono l'estremo dell'alto e del fondo' (II.661).

Throughout the discussion above, there is quite literally no space in Bruno's philosophy for Christian end-times. Instead, the physical and cosmological structure of the universe expounded in the Italian dialogues is infinite in both time and space.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, if Bruno is 'desensitised' to death, then this is because he does not believe death can be said to exist at all. Instead, the certainty of death is replaced by the certainty of vicissitude, to such an extent that the future holds little mystique for Bruno. In light of Kenny's hypothesis, we have begun to witness the true complexity of responses to time in the 16th century. In this case, Bruno puts forth an understanding of the future that has been shaped by a range of classical sources, particularly the work of the pre-Socratics, as well as certain Bible verses.<sup>61</sup> In *De la causa*, another description of the 'sameness' of time emerges that simultaneously embraces all of the repeated references I have highlighted in this discussion. In this example Bruno draws on Pythagoras to emphasise his point:

Questo lo ha possuto intendere Pitagora, che non teme la morte ma aspetta la mutazione: l'hanno possuto intendere tutti filosofi chiamati volgarmente fisici, che niente dicono generarsi secondo sustanza né corrompersi: se non vogliamo nominar in questo modo la alterazione; questo lo ha inteso Salomone, che dice non esser cosa nova sotto il sole: ma quel che è fu già prima. (*Causa* I.729)

Like Pythagoras, Bruno is content to await the mutation of his body and soul rather than exhorting Christian moral action, sincere in the belief of his unique philosophy. The future has a different kind of certainty attributed to it, and one that Bruno can point to physically in the world around him - one of renewal, plain and simple. Life is one stage within the process of vicissitude: 'non bisogna temere la morte, ma, come afferma Pitagora, attenderla come un momento di passaggio'.<sup>62</sup> Bruno renews ancient Pythagorean theory and consequently the 16th century, Scholastic-Christian definition of death is unrecognisable within Bruno's philosophy; his idea of time is one which favours a fullness that can only come with the continual renewal of matter rather than a linear perception that embraces death and then eternal Afterlife. Time resembles a more circular process because as Bruno states in the *Candelaio*, 'il tempo tutto toglie tutto da' (*Candelaio* I.263).

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<sup>60</sup> Granada, *Fureurs héroïques*, p. 1. Bruno describes 'un univers corporel infini et homogène tant dans l'espace que dans le temps (ce qui, sur le plan temporel, signifiait éternité et identité de l'univers, et excluait toute notion de fin du monde et de mutation eschatologique)'.

<sup>61</sup> See Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, 'Introduction'; Koder, pp. 236-237; Elena Maria Severini, 'Vicissitudine e tempo nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno', in *La mente di Giordano Bruno*, ed. by F. Meroi (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2004), pp. 225-258; Tessicini, 'Attoniti...', p. 523.

<sup>62</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Opere Latine*, trans. by Carlo Monti (Turin: UTET, 2013), p. 78.

The benefits of considering time in this manner clear the way for a different response to the future rather than fear. In one passage from the *Furori* Bruno is discussing those people who can look beyond the everyday and focus their energies on a higher plane of knowledge:

De quali alcune vituperosa, altre eroicamente fanno che non s'apprenda téma di morte, non si soffrisca dolor di corpo, non si sentano impedimenti di piaceri: onde la speranza, la gioia, e gli dilette del spirto superiore siano di tal sorte intenti, che faccian spente le passioni tutte che possano aver origine da dubbio, dolore e tristezza alcuna. (*Furori* II.263)

This quotation is one of many passages in the *Eroici Furori* - Bruno's final work in the series of Italian dialogues - that replaces death more precisely with a mingling with the divine, an idea I examine further in Chapter Three. In light of his firm belief in the truth of his philosophy, fear of death is also a waste of time and energy, and one who acts 'heroically' can vanquish these things. Nevertheless, Bruno has already posed a challenge to the linear time outlined in Chapter One by replacing it with an idea of future time that appears to have more in common with Hellenic time. When we understand that he does not believe death exists and that there is no room in his theories for a conception of an Afterlife, then Christian end-time truly disappears, even though he occasionally draws on Christian source texts. Bruno claims this as the true face of Nature's time - the natural order is circular, one of renewal, and one that should not be feared since there is 'nothing new under the sun.'

### *Montaigne, suicide and near-death experience*

Bruno used fear of death as a platform to promote his philosophy and its unique reimagining of future time. Montaigne is equally fascinated by fear of death, albeit for different reasons. It is clear that death is a significant theme in the *Essais* - it is one aspect of time that takes up a great deal of Montaigne's writing. The body was believed to house the soul and consequently the mind, which responds to time in different ways. Like Bruno, Montaigne understands that fear is one such response. In the *Essais* fear is marked out as a baffling emotion; in the aptly-named Chapter 'De la peur' (I.XVIII) fear is 'une estrange passion' (I.XVIII.75) and one that is particularly potent since it can severely impact on human judgement 'hors de sa deue assiette' (I.XVIII.75). Furthermore, fear exists in the mind but often manifests itself visibly through the body; Montaigne states

that 'elle [la peur] engendre de terribles esblouissements' (I.XVIII.75), one of many quotations in his writing that describes how fear, and in particular fear of death, affects the body physically as well as mentally (Joukovsky has previously argued that fear of death in the *Essais* is not a Christian fear, rather it is 'purement physique').<sup>63</sup> 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir' (I.XX) is one of Montaigne's best-known chapters, and - as the title suggests - it provides some typical reflections on how fear of death affects human beings<sup>64</sup>:

Et par consequent, si elle nous faict peur, c'est un subject continuel de tourment, et qui ne se peut aucunement soulager. Il n'est lieu d'où elle ne nous vienne; nous pouvons tourner sans cesse la teste cà et là comme en pays suspect: quae quasi saxum Tantalo semper impendet. (I.XX.83)

In 'Que Philosopher' Montaigne admits that, while fear can lead humans to 'mespriser la douleur, la pauvreté, et autres accidens à quoy la vie humaine est subjecte' (I.XX.83), the quotation above describes the special torment that only death inspires: 'il n'est lieu d'où elle ne nous vienne' (I.XX.83). Montaigne suggests that death is the most frightening aspect of future time because, unlike most other things, it is an absolute certainty: 'quant à la mort, elle est inevitable' (I.XX.83). As with Bruno, fear of death stems from a realisation of human powerlessness in time rather than anxiety over sinning and going to Hell; as such it becomes impossible to 'attendre patiemment la mort, quand elle nous vient' (II.III.368). Equally, 'nous pouvons tourner sans cesse la teste cà et là comme en pays suspect' (I.XX.83), but unfortunately the ability to think (or not think) about death does not change its absolute certainty.

Fear of death is 'pire de toutes les maladies, la plus soudaine, la plus douloureuse, la plus mortelle et la plus irremediable' (II.XXXVII.760). And yet it is this word 'irremediable' that arguably drives Montaigne's purpose throughout this discussion - is fear of death really incurable? How does philosophy traditionally approach death? Can these answers be put to any practical use? Whereas Bruno believes that he offers a complete solution to fear of death with his radical philosophy, Montaigne challenges the advice of existing classical traditions, drawing on examples from Antiquity and combining them with personal experience in order to experiment with the natural order of time. Montaigne certainly came very close to death after falling from his horse, and in

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<sup>63</sup> Joukovsky, p. 245.

<sup>64</sup> See Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonen (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 1358 for further discussion on the significance of the chapter title in relation to Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius*.

the process, he becomes another example of how to behave when faced with the possibility of death. Ultimately, Montaigne cannot deny the reality of death (in stark contrast with Bruno's approach). However, he does provide a much greater degree of choice over time to human beings, influenced in part by classical traditions that were largely incompatible with Christian eschatology. In particular, suicide proves to be a continual fascination for Montaigne. It is an extreme act and a religious taboo, but one that undermines the seeming lack of choice that humans possess over their fate. Furthermore, Montaigne's accident on the horse happened years before he began writing the *Essais*, but the incident that he recounts in 'De l'exercitation' discards the rigid natural order of time from Chapter One. In both cases, Montaigne rejects the body's passivity and replaces it with an exploration of the extent to which humans might be able to overcome their mortality.

Like Bruno, Montaigne primarily embraces pre-Christian philosophies to make sense of fear of death.<sup>65</sup> That is not to say that thinkers in the Christian tradition lacked an approach to death preparation. As Pierre Hadot has ably demonstrated, ever since the earliest days of Christendom the religion acted as a vessel for ancient philosophical approaches to mortality; this rich tradition of Christian philosophy and training for death continued well into the 17th century.<sup>66</sup> However, Montaigne usually quotes directly from the philosophers of Antiquity. Mirroring Bruno and his favoured passages from the *Metamorphoses*, a common source that Montaigne returns to throughout the *Essais* comes in the form of the Stoic philosopher Seneca, whose *meditatio mortis* (meditation on death) would prove to be extremely useful to the French thinker. In 'Du Pedantisme' (I.XXV) it is Seneca that he names directly as his most important tool in combatting fear of death: 'Me veus-je armer contre la crainte de la mort? c'est aux despens de Seneca' (I.XXV.138). True to his word, in 'De la Phisionomie' (III.XII), Montaigne adopts a passage from Seneca's *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (Letters to Lucilius), in which Seneca reproaches Lucilius for becoming too absorbed in the future at the expense of the present: 'Que te sert il d'aller recueillant et prevenant ta male fortune, et de perdre le present par la crainte du futur? (III.XII.1050).

In stark contrast to the critical trends identified in 'Context: 16th-Century Futures', Montaigne repeats the claims of classical Stoicism that human beings avoid

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<sup>65</sup> For an introduction to the various classical traditions in the *Essais* see David Lewis Schaefer, 'Montaigne and the Classical Tradition', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 8.2 (2001), pp. 179-194.

<sup>66</sup> See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold I. Davidson and trans. by Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).



practical preparations for death out of fear or anxiety. He argues that ‘nous nous preparons contre les preparations de la mort’ (III.XII.1051); ‘à la plus part la preparation à la mort a donné plus de tourment que n’a faict lea souffrance’ (III.XII.1051). Seneca decreed that often the fear of something bad occurring is worse than the ‘bad thing’ itself; ‘Que le Goust des biens et des maux’ expresses this very same idea in both the title and its opening line: ‘Les hommes (dit une sentence Grecque ancienne) sont tourmentez par les opinions qu’ils ont des choses, non par les choses mesmes’ (I.XIV.50). Later in the ‘Isle de Cea’ Montaigne concurs that fear of death (i.e., fear of pain) is often worse than death itself: ‘c’est plustost l’impatience de l’imagination de la mort, qui nous rend impatiens de la douleur: et que nous la sentons doublement grieve, de ce qu’elle nous menace de mourir’ (II.III.264).<sup>67</sup> Similarly, in ‘Que Nostre Desir S’accroit par la Malaisance’ (II.XV), Montaigne echoes this advice specifically in relation to death, employing a Latin phrase directly from the *Epistulae morales*: ‘In aequo est dolor amissae rei, et timor amittendae; voulant gagner par là que la fruition de la vie ne nous peut estre vraiment plaisante, si nous sommes en crainte de la perdre’ (II.XV.612). Fear of losing something and actually losing it are two sides of the same coin - fear of death can be as painful as death itself. Consequently, death may be considered in a positive light, as an escape from the torments of life: ‘Or cette mort que les uns appellent des choses horribles la plus horrible, qui ne sçait que d’autres la nomment l’unique port des tourmens de ceste vie?’ (I.XIV.259). Again in these examples, fear of death is not a fear of sinning and going to Hell, instead it is rooted in Stoical concerns over pain and the significance of the present moment. Montaigne is clearly fascinated by this fear, but his interest is fuelled by the discussions he finds in various classical sources - in this case, Seneca.

It must be acknowledged that these conclusions are not particularly radical by 16th-century standards. First, like many thinkers of his age, Montaigne drew upon a range of classical sources to inform himself on a variety of topics. Second, such ideas had been explored by Christian philosophers for many centuries; from the earliest Church fathers to devout Renaissance thinkers, the Christian philosophical tradition had long preached similar preparations to those of Seneca.<sup>68</sup> The only difference between the ancient philosophers and their Christian counterparts was the idea that training for death was a way to embrace God’s love, an idea which is also absent in Montaigne’s work. Instead,

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<sup>67</sup> Bruno also cites Seneca in order to emphasise that often the fear of something bad occurring is worse than the ‘bad thing’ itself: ‘vede gli effetti del timor del male, il quale è peggio ch’il male istesso’ (II.681).

<sup>68</sup> ‘Thus, for example, Evagrius Ponticus used to invite his disciples to imagine their own death, the decomposition of their bodies, the terrors and sufferings of their souls in Hell, and eternal fire; then, by way of contrast, they were to picture the happiness of the just’ (Hadot, p. 133).

Montaigne's radical experimentation with the future arguably stems from his desire to try and put the advice on death that he reads about in books to practical use. He pursues this objective through 'practising' what is probably the most challenging philosophical conundrum of all - death: 'L'avenir signifant la mort, il [Montaigne] s'y projette afin de s'y préparer au mieux'.<sup>69</sup> In 'De l'exercitation' (II.VI) Montaigne once again expresses his desire to focus primarily on the 'moy': 'Ce ne sont pas mes gestes que j'escris, c'est moy, c'est mon essence' (II.VI.379).<sup>70</sup> Part of this objective involves working from personal experience, rather than solely immersing himself in books: 'Il est malaisé que le discours et l'instruction....soient assez puissantes pour nous acheminer jusques à l'action' (II.VI.370). As Montaigne writes, the bookish authority of ancient philosophers (e.g., Seneca, as above) must be balanced out by personal experience and living, and so Montaigne attempts to 'essai' death itself.

In 'De l'exercitation' Montaigne navigates this process by first examining some practical attempts by various philosophers to prepare themselves for death. Montaigne quickly reaches the conclusion that 'à mourir, qui est la plus grande besoigne que nous ayons à faire, l'exercitation ne nous y peut ayder' (II.VI.371). However, this fact alone does not prevent him from trying to practice death anyway, and the true purpose of 'De l'exercitation' reveals itself thus: 'si l'expérience de la mort n'est pas possible, nous pouvons du moins connaître des états voisins de la mort'.<sup>71</sup> How does one go about practising death, the one entity that ends all future time? Is it really possible to practice it at all? As the chapter titles suggest, in 'Que philosopher' Montaigne approaches death from a distinctly philosophical angle, while 'De l'expérience' represents a form of practice too - a deeply personal form of practice. 'De l'exercitation' lies somewhere in the middle of these approaches. Can any of the philosophy that Montaigne reads about death transform itself into direct and meaningful action? As we will see, Montaigne is not content to dwell on how and why people may fear death and instead tests the boundaries of temporality. 'De l'exercitation' (II.VI) has already received attention from a number of Montaigne scholars who have managed to dissect various philosophical concerns borne out in Montaigne's

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<sup>69</sup> Albert Ahmeti, *De la peinture du temps dans les 'Essais' de Montaigne* (Paris: Books On Demand, 2014), '2.2. Le temps prospectif'.

<sup>70</sup> 'Il y a plusieurs années que je n'ay que moy pour visée à mes pensées, que je ne contrerolle et estude que moy' (II.VI.378).

<sup>71</sup> Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, p. 1519.

text, from ideas of the soul to the faculty of imagination.<sup>72</sup> However, Montaigne's unconventional attempt to record his death on paper, many years after the original incident, also yields a fascinating manipulation of time. It is this willingness to 'practice' death which once led Hadot to identify Montaigne as one of the last ancient philosophers; his *Essais* arguably represent a breviary on the Stoic approach to life in the face of mortality.<sup>73</sup> As Montaigne recounts his own 'practice' of death, several layers of time emerge and overlap in a far cry from the simple progression of time introduced in Chapter One.

Montaigne commences his account of the accident somewhat abruptly. Only a couple of pages in to 'De l'exercitation', the reader is quickly immersed in Montaigne's stream of consciousness as he begins to revisit the incident. He believes (since his memory is somewhat clouded) that he was thrown ten or twelve paces from his horse, calmly stating that - as a result of this - he died: 'voilà le cheval abbatu et couché tout estourdy, moy dix ou douze pas au delà, mort' (II.VI.373). The perspective of the account is immediately unnatural and strange; Montaigne the narrator appears to recount himself *mort* in the present tense 'n'ayant ny mouvement ny sentiment' (II.VI.373). Of course, Montaigne and his readers know that he did not really die, since he has managed to record the episode himself - instead the author acquired a state akin to death and calls upon this incident years later. However, the narration is confused by the actual account itself; Montaigne's consciousness narrates and reflects on the incident step-by-step as it happened to his 'dead' body. The reader's uneasiness with all of these perspectives is compounded when Montaigne describes how the rest of his party believed him to be dead: 'ceux qui estoient avec moy, apres avoir essayé par tous les moyens qu'ils peurent, de me faire revenir, me tenans pour mort' (II.VI.373). An uncanny temporality invades the chapter, especially in light of the supposed linearity of time in the *Essais* - his companions attempt to 'bring him back' and yet he already appears to have died.<sup>74</sup> However, Montaigne calmly recounts how he was carried into his house, taken for dead, as his consciousness appears to float outside of his body and recall the scene around himself.

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<sup>72</sup> See Felicity Green, 'Montaigne's Soul'; Georges Hoffman, 'Portrayal from Life, or to Life. The *Essais*'s Living Effigy', *French Forum*, 25.2 (2000), pp. 145-163; Alain Legros, 'Pour illustrer Montaigne. Trois gravures à l'essai', *Journal de la Renaissance*, 4 (2006), pp. 249-264; John O'Brien, 'Reasoning with the Senses: The Humanist Imagination', *South Central Review*, 10.2 (1993), pp. 3-19.

<sup>73</sup> Hadot, p. 33.

<sup>74</sup> Felicity Green highlights the bizarre nature of the account, referring to Montaigne's accident as his 'first death, which lasts just a few hours' (p. 95).

In addition, Montaigne frequently portrays himself as drifting between life and death in the text (a death which he is still able to remember and write about years later): ‘Par là je commençay à reprendre un peu de vie, mais ce fut par les menus et par un si long traict de temps que mes premiers sentimens estoient beaucoup plus approchans de la mort que de la vie’ (II.VI.373).<sup>75</sup> Here Montaigne suggests that he has managed to come back from death by recouping ‘un peu de vie’, an idea which plays with the finality of death and again reverses the direction of natural, linear time. At one stage, Montaigne recalls that he believed himself to be so close to dying that he actively ran towards death: ‘je fermois les yeux pour ayder...et prenois plaisir à m’alanguir et à me laisser aller’ (II.VI.374) - he willed himself further on towards the end of life, reversing the direction of time once more. Montaigne has suffered what modern audiences would refer to as a near-death experience, a true ‘état voisin de la mort’ which blurs the arrow of time itself.

The simple depiction of the body in time that I introduced in Chapter One is not present in these passages. Instead, Montaigne has achieved a personal - albeit incomplete - account of death, one which defines the spirit of the word *essai* as a trial or attempt. In doing so, Montaigne breaks all of the rules dictating the natural order of time. The finality of death is completely undermined. It becomes a state that may be freely manipulated in Montaigne’s writing and even physically practised to a certain extent; one can run toward death or pull away from it - in either case, individuals are no longer inexorably drawn towards death. Admittedly, the fact is always in the back of our minds - and Montaigne himself knows - that death cannot be avoided. However, ‘De l’exercitation’ represents his best effort at exerting his mental freedom by revisiting a past near-death experience and using his memory of it to undermine the seemingly rigid foundations of linear time.

If his near-death experience is Montaigne’s own attempt at practical philosophy, then he is equally if not more fascinated by philosophers who have purposely ended their own life. In the *Essais* Montaigne does not hide his interest in extreme forms of human behaviour, and suicide is no different - in fact, it represents another way of experimenting with future time.<sup>76</sup> Suicide was a popular Stoic theme, but in the late 1500s, it was a

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<sup>75</sup> Previous criticism has discussed in more detail this jarring between body and soul in ‘De l’exercitation’ particularly concerning *volonté* and the imagination; see Green, p. 97. Furthermore, O’Brien states that: ‘One might almost conclude from Montaigne’s account that there is a bodily imagination as well as a mental imagination’ (p. 13).

<sup>76</sup> See Eric MacPhail, ‘Montaigne and the Praise of Sparta’, *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 20.2 (2002), pp. 193-211; Patrick Henry, ‘The Dialectic of Suicide in Montaigne’s “Coustume de l’Isle de Cea”’, *The Modern Language Review*, 79.2 (1984), pp. 278-289; Elaine Limbrick, ‘Montaigne and Socrates’, *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 9.2 (1973), pp. 46-57.

dangerous concept to write about if the author did not condemn the act outright.<sup>77</sup> However, Montaigne does not condemn it at all. In the *Essais* suicide arguably appears in a positive and empowering light - it destroys the preeminence of the natural order of time and undermines the idea that we are all destined to succumb to our mortal fate. Suicide does more than 'rethink' time - it hands over direct control of death to the individual. Rather than 'waiting' for death to occur, the body destroys itself. In Chapter One, I examined graphic images of the body dying due to disease, accident or the violence of others; in both the 'Isle de Cea' and 'Que le Goust des biens et des maux', Montaigne also lists countless examples of people actively dying by their own hand.<sup>78</sup> A young woman throws herself in the river with her mother and sisters; villagers who are about to be captured fling themselves into a fire; Nicanor chooses to die rather than fall into the hands of enemies, and stabs himself, bangs his head against a rock and finally pulls out his own entrails. These shocking examples reveal a deeply heightened sense of control over time. Montaigne is quick to emphasise that suicide allows the young woman to escape from being gang-raped by soldiers, while the villagers who burn in the fire have escaped enslavement, just like Nicanor. Linking back to Seneca and the idea that there are worse things in life than death, it appears that on an individual level, humans are capable of destroying the natural order of time, and why not?<sup>79</sup> Montaigne makes a convincing argument in favour of the idea that sometimes human life is bleak - suicide is an individual choice that can end a potentially miserable existence.

Despite the moral objections it would have raised in the 16th century,<sup>80</sup> this admiration of suicide continues to manifest itself through Montaigne's discussion of the deaths of Cato the Younger (95 BC-46 BC) and Socrates (c.470 BC-399 BC) - two examples of pre-Christian figures engaging in an act that the Catholic Church would have considered to be a cardinal sin. In order to try and combat 'an increase in the *per capita* ratio of suicide' in the late 16th century, the Church had clamped down on it as a morally

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<sup>77</sup> Henry, p. 278. The Church's stance was very clear in this respect - all suicides were morally unjustifiable. See MacPhail, 'Montaigne and the Praise of Sparta', p. 205.

<sup>78</sup> See Henry for context on Montaigne's title choice concerning 'Isle de Cea': 'As regards 'actual' subject-matter, however, no essay is more straightforward, particularly in its 1580 form. After a short preface, it deals with suicide from beginning to end' (p. 279).

<sup>79</sup> See Henry on Seneca and suicide: 'On the one hand, Seneca's aim was to help men to conduct their lives in accordance with divine will and, on the other, he normally permitted suicide when the advantages of living were outweighed by the disadvantages of living' (p. 281).

<sup>80</sup> For wider context, see also Michael MacDonald & Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

reprehensible act, no matter the circumstances surrounding it.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, Montaigne repeatedly returns to examples of self-murder and emphasises the control over time that this act implies.

The death of Socrates was a well-known story in the Renaissance, and the Socratic precept to 'Know thyself' clearly had a huge impact on Montaigne's thought.<sup>82</sup> Two major sources utilised by Montaigne are Plato and Xenophon, who had both written lengthy accounts of Socrates and his trial; somewhat tellingly Montaigne favoured Xenophon's narration due to his emphasis on Socrates 'practical morality'.<sup>83</sup> At the start of 'De l'exercitation' Montaigne states that some philosophers, even though '[ils] ont voulu atteindre à quelque plus grande excellence' (II.VI.370), wildly threw themselves into predicaments so it would not seem as though they were incapable of combatting fortuitous events. An emphasis on meaningful action continues, as Montaigne suggests that philosophers have previously refused to 'wait out' bad times: '[ils] ne se sont pas contentez d'attendre à couvert et en repos les rigueurs de la fortune, de peur qu'elle ne les surprint inexperiencez et nouveaux au combat' (II.VI.370). But how does one practically prepare for death? Montaigne's admiration for philosophy in practice arguably reaches its apotheosis in the deaths of both Socrates and Cato. For example, in 'De Jurer de la Mort d'Autrui' (II.XIII), Montaigne praises Socrates for devoting the time before his death to productive thoughts and actions that refused to submit to fear:

L'estre mort ne les fache pas, mais ouy bien le mourir, *Emori nolo, sed me esse mortuum nihili aestimo*. C'est un degré de fermeté auquel j'ay expérimenté que je pourrois arriver, ainsi que ceux qui se jettent dans les dangers comme dans la mer, à yeux clos. Il n'y a rien, selon moy, plus illustre en la vie de Socrates que d'avoir eu trente jours entiers à ruminer le decret de sa mort; de l'avoir digérée tout ce temps là d'une tres certaine esperance, sans esmoy, sans alteration, et d'un train d'actions et de parolles ravallé plustost et anonchali que tendu et relevé par le poids d'une telle cogitation. (II.XIII.608-609)

'Un degré de fermeté' is the exact opposite of the bodily and mental responses to death that fear often incites. Rather than fear transmitting to the body, Socrates' actions 'ravallé....anonchali' are in tune with the thoughts of his mind 'sans esmoy, sans

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<sup>81</sup> Henry, p. 279.

<sup>82</sup> For more on Socrates' famous dictum, see Limbrick, pp. 48-49. In Frederick Kellermann, 'Montaigne Reader of Plato', *Comparative Literature*, 4 (1956), pp. 307-322, Kellermann emphasises the degree to which Montaigne was influenced by Socrates: 'The power and attraction of Socrates for Montaigne are unparalleled by any other figures in the *Essais*, and are alone sufficient to account for his prolonged interest in the [Platonic] *Dialogues*. Indeed, Montaigne most often interprets Plato as a Socratic...' (p. 308).

<sup>83</sup> Limbrick, 'Montaigne and Socrates', p. 46; see also Schaefer, p. 182 on Plato, Xenophon and Socrates in the *Essais*.

alteration'. Following his trial, Socrates was found guilty of corruption and impiety; he was sentenced to death by swallowing poison hemlock and would have to act as his own executioner. Faced with this dilemma, Socrates did not succumb to blind panic or fear; rather he contemplated it calmly: 'un train d'actions et de paroles ravallé'. In doing so, Socrates reaps the benefits of his *meditatio mortis* which was shaped by a firm belief in the idea that death's uncertainty was not necessarily a bad thing.<sup>84</sup> Inspired by this commitment to responding to 'le poids d'une telle cogitation' in such a way, Montaigne admits that he himself has attempted to emulate this mindset: 'C'est un degré de fermeté auquel j'ay expérimenté que je pourrais arriver'.

In the *Essais*, Cato's death is held up in a slightly different light to Socrates.<sup>85</sup> Cato's suicide is much bloodier and more dramatic than that of Socrates; it is a voluntary act that Montaigne himself would never be able to imitate. In Chapter One I repeatedly described the definition of a 'natural' death in the *Essais* - Cato's philosophical suicide is perhaps the most dramatic example of a completely unnatural death:

L'extreme degré de traicter courageusement la mort, et le plus naturel, c'est la voir non seulement sans estonnement, mais sans soin, continuant libre le train de la vie jusques dans elle. Comme Caton qui s'amusoit à dormir et à estudier, en ayant une, violente et sanglante, presente en sa teste et en son coeur, et la tenant en sa main. (II.XXI.679)

He describes Cato's death as an 'extreme' act of courage. He is a philosopher 'whose virtue "climbed so high" as not merely to despise pain but to "rejoice" in it'. Therefore his bloody and violent suicide - in which Cato disembowels himself - is a deliberate attempt to seek out pain and guaranteed death.<sup>86</sup> David Schaefer has linked this extreme act to Montaigne's direct attack on popular religious attitudes towards death in the *Essais*. Dying 'insensibly' in the manner of Cato is preferable to a lifetime spent worrying about one's actions and repenting of one's sins on a daily basis. In other chapters, Montaigne praises those philosophers whose words and actions go together, in comparison to Church prelates whose own version of the future holds their clergy up to a lifetime of impossible standards: 'Je voy souvent qu'on nous propose des images de vie,

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<sup>84</sup> See Gareth B. Matthews, 'Death in Socrates, Aristotle and Plato' in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*, ed. by Ben Bradley, Fred Feldman and Jens Johansson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 186-199. Socrates echoes Stoic advice in the Apology: 'No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew it is the greatest of evils' (p. 187).

<sup>85</sup> See Limbrick, 'Montaigne and Socrates', p. 51 for more on Cato, Socrates and Crito in the *Essais*.

<sup>86</sup> Schaefer, p. 185. See also David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), Chapter Two, 'Cruelty and Noblesse: "De la cruauté" and "Couardise mere de la cruauté"'. Quint discusses Cato's calm manner in the face of death with reference to passages from 'Toutes choses ont leur saison' (II.XXVIII).

lesquelles ny le proposant ny les auditeurs n'ont aucune esperance de suyvre' (III.IX. 989).<sup>87</sup> Cato's suicide was enacted on his terms rather than those of an almighty Godhead.

Furthermore, time's 'natural order' is thrown into confusion after Montaigne labels Cato's self-inflicted death 'le plus naturel' of all. Elsewhere in the *Essais*, examples of death by stabbing and other weaponry are considered to be highly unnatural. However, Cato has been so diligent in his study of death that not only is he unafraid to meet it, the philosopher cannot wait for death any longer and thus brings the moment of death forward himself. He achieves this state of mind through the practice of Stoicism. As a follower of Stoic philosophy, Cato would have used a heightened awareness of the present to try and improve himself and understand what he really was - a human being.<sup>88</sup> Marcus Aurelius embodies this *meditatio mortis* thus: 'Let your every deed and word and thought be those of one who might depart from this life this very moment'.<sup>89</sup> Cato follows this advice to the extreme - his preparation is so meticulous that he seeks out death in a calm and indifferent state, seemingly 'sans soin' in the manner of Socrates. Arguably Cato's death is natural because he has achieved a state akin to that of an animal that is blissfully unaware of its mortality. As described in Chapter One, animals do not have the same consciousness of time and act only according to the present needs of their body ('Les bestes...laissent aux corps leurs sentiments, libres et naïfs' (I.XIV.58)). Ironically, Cato's preparation for the future at every present moment leaves him untroubled by death in the same manner as 'les bestes' which do not need to prepare for death at all. If the future is a human concern, as so many 16th-century thinkers felt it was (and Montaigne himself admitted), then thinking about death in the Stoic manner frees one of fear over the future and arguably puts humans back on the same level as animals.

Another particularly interesting illustration of an individual actively taking death into their own hands features in 'De Juger de la Mort d'Autrui' (II.XIII). Montaigne relates the story of Marcellinus: 'Au reste, il n'y eust besoing de fer ny de sang: il [Marcellinus] entreprit de s'en aller de cette vie, non de s'en fuir; non d'eschapper à la mort, mais de l'essayer' (II.XIII.610). The contrasting couplets of verbs at the end of this sentence emphasise how suicide marks a radical difference between control and lack of control over time. In this example, Marcellinus chose to die: 'il entreprit de s'en aller'. Rather than being forced to escape (*eschapper*) he chose to *essayer* - to 'try' death. The

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<sup>87</sup> Schaefer, pp. 184-185; pp. 190-191.

<sup>88</sup> See Hadot, pp. 130-131.

<sup>89</sup> Hadot, p. 132.



choice of the verb *essayer* takes on a completely new meaning in relation to death - usually trying or attempting something suggests that one may be able to try it over and over again, as Montaigne often does in his writing when he attacks an issue from several different angles. However, the idea that one may be able to 'try' death poses a serious challenge to how this thesis has considered human existence in time so far. This is partly why Montaigne admires these examples so much, despite the serious moral objections they would have raised in the 16th century. 'De l'exercitation' began to hint at this possibility when Montaigne recalled his own attempt to run towards death rather than avoid it. Furthermore, rather than fleeing death, Marcellinus died of his own accord, not Nature's accord - the natural order of time has deliberately been trumped. Marcellinus' death arrives 'avant le temps et l'occasion' (II.III.355), but it is radical because Marcellinus has extended a degree of control over time, dictating the timing and circumstances of his own death, even if death itself cannot be avoided.

Finally, Montaigne even queries whether it might be possible to die, or experience something like death, before returning to a normal existence in time. In 'De l'exercitation', the idea of trying death once again appears to be a futile task: 'quant à la mort, nous ne la pouvons essayer qu'une fois...' (II.VI.371). Unfortunately, it is impossible for human beings to 'remember' death or infer the true nature of it from past sources; as Montaigne humorously reminds his readers, there is no philosopher who can say 'this happened to me when I died': 'mais ils ne sont pas revenus nous en dire les nouvelles' (II.VI.371). However, this basic fact does not stop Montaigne from first attempting in 'De l'exercitation' to draw upon real-life historical examples in order to 'practice' death anyway - the accident that he suffered clearly made a lasting impression and remained in his memory several years later. Indeed, Montaigne concludes that he feels it is possible to approach death or practice it, albeit in an incomplete way: 'nous la pouvons joindre, nous la pouvons approcher, nous la pouvons reconnoître' (II.VI.372). In much the same vein as his praise of Cato and Socrates, Montaigne is impressed by how Julius Canius was a philosopher right until the very end of his life, emphasising how courageous he was 'de vouloir que sa mort luy servit de leçon' (II.VI.371). Canius' friend asks him: 'en quelle démarche est à cette heure vostre ame? que fait elle? en quels pensemens estes vous?' (II.VI.371). Canius replies: 'Je pensois...à me tenir prest et bandé de toute ma force, pour voir si, en cet instant de la mort, si court et si brief, je pourray appercevoir quelque deslogement de l'ame' (II.VI.371). Here the paradox of a finite body and a consciously finite mind reaches its apotheosis - Canius attempts to defy this situation and suggests the possibility of coming back to life and telling his friends about death: 'en revenir donner

apres, si je puis, advertissement à mes amis' (II.VI.371). As a result, Montaigne labels Canius a man 'de vertu et fermeté singuliere' (II.VI.371). Although Canius was at the mercy of objective time, 'practising' death in this way signified a last act of control. Montaigne was fascinated by the extent to which someone can live their philosophy, and concludes in admiring terms: 'Cettuy-cy philosophe non seulement jusqu'à la mort, mais en la mort mesme' (II.VI.371). While it may never be physically possible to return from death, humans can test the boundaries of their temporal condition in ways that undermine the power of the natural order of time.

In the examples above, Montaigne provides his readers with something that was absent in Chapter One: control. Of course, in the *Essais* humans cannot choose not to die. However, Montaigne demonstrates that there are - albeit some very extreme - choices with regard to when and how humans die, choices that completely undermine the fixed natural order of time. When humans contemplate time outside of the body's present existence, freedom exists to experiment with what the future means:

Voicy les mots de la loy sur ce subject: Si d'aventure il survient quelque grand inconvenient qui ne se puisse remedier, le port est prochain; et se peut on sauver à nage hors du corps comme hors d'un esquif qui faict eau: car c'est la crainte de mourir, non pas le desir de vivre, qui tient le fol attaché au corps. (II.XII.497)

Focusing only on objective time, i.e. what time does to the body, causes one to fear death. However, humans do have the power to exploit their own mortality - as in the example above, death can be used in an empowering way, in order to end suffering or pain: 'le port est prochain'. The soul has the power to subvert fear of death: 'c'est chez nous, au dedans, où nuls yeux ne donnent que les nostres: là elle nous couvre de la crainte de la mort, des douleurs et de la honte mesme' (II.XVI.623). Montaigne is fascinated by the extreme examples he knows from history, such as that of Cato, and openly admires the death of Socrates. In 'De l'exercitation', his purpose in the *Essais* continues resolutely even in the face of death; it is a chapter which blurs the lines between life and death and questions the true 'linearity' of time.

In Chapter One, time flowed relentlessly in one direction, whereas in 'De l'exercitation' Montaigne has - almost - reversed the arrow of time himself. Furthermore, Montaigne displays a distinct 'estrangement from institutional responses to the problem of death' that were highlighted in 'Context: 16th-Century Futures'.<sup>90</sup> Religious ideas of the future are notably absent, and I have purposely avoided repeatedly trying to relate

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<sup>90</sup> Hoffman, p. 157.

examples of suicide and near-death to a 16th-century Christian context. Montaigne certainly does not attempt this, and shows little interest in actively engaging with religious ideas of the future.<sup>91</sup> Instead, I argue that Montaigne is interested in how philosophy reconciles one to death, and whether such advice can in fact be put to good use. In doing so, he shows his readers that while the death of the body cannot be avoided, humans can generate meaningful approaches to temporality that undermine the idea of the passive body in time.

## Conclusion

My initial discussion of conceptions of time in Montaigne and Bruno has evolved a long way since focusing on the basic ‘train’ of the body in Chapter One. In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how human beings possess the ability to subvert the natural order of time. Montaigne and Bruno clearly demonstrate that they are capable of envisioning different ideas of future time - after all, as both thinkers remind their readers, the power to change this conception of the future ‘se loger en nous’, it is inside us, ‘dentro di sé’; ‘il est en nous de la changer: et en ayant le choix, si nul ne nous force, nous sommes estrangement fols de nous bander pour le party qui nous est le plus ennuyeux’ (I.XIV.50). Both Montaigne and Bruno focus on a response to time - fear of death - that previous scholars tend to have undervalued in the 16th century, and they do this in order to generate new responses to time that redefine the future and complicate traditional conceptions of time in the early modern period.

Why do they do this? Bruno partly seizes on fear of death in order to promote his philosophical aims and admiration for pre-Socratic philosophers, while Montaigne continues his quest to write his own being in time, shaped by a dramatic near-death experience, while putting the advice of classical philosophers to the test. As a result, Christian end-time offers little insight to either of them and in rejecting the temporal norms of their age, they propose new responses to time - in this case, future time. Both Montaigne’s examination of suicide, and Bruno’s commitment to vicissitude’s infinite duration are further examples of how they attribute a more positive characteristic to the

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<sup>91</sup> Kenny, *Death and Tenses*, p. 231. ‘Ways of surviving into or beyond death are persistently mulled over in the *Essais*, but without evocation of Heaven, Hell or Purgatory, and with only occasional, vague allusions to the ‘other world’. From the *Essais*: ‘Il n’y a point de fin en nos inquisitions: Notre fin est en l’autre monde’ (III.13.1068). In *Montaigne philosophe* Maclean argues that one of the few Christian dogmas Montaigne engages with is the idea of resurrection because of his interest in the body (p. 70).

future through their emphasis on human action. They both achieve this by diminishing the importance of objective time and their supposedly finite existence within it.

For now, it seems that despite the Christian time discussed at the start of this chapter, the *Essais* and Italian dialogues reveal a fascination with humans and time that has continued from Chapter One - ‘c’est toujours à l’homme que nous avons affaire’ (III.VIII.930). What are human beings capable of? What is it within our power to do? We have now established that human beings are in a curious position with regards to time - at least, this is how Montaigne and Bruno appear to understand it. The body is destined to die, and the mind recognises this fact but also exerts a degree of freedom in time that the corporeal body (of which it is a part) does not possess. Furthermore, they do not respond to apocalyptic end-times such as the Last Judgement. I have attempted to explain this pattern with a focus on their engagement with philosophers who would have had no understanding of Christian linear time. In Chapter Three I argue that their primary response to the future is defined by a desire to seek knowledge about the world. They want to exploit the possibilities that the future holds rather than just redefining it. I consider these ideas in light of another aspect of time - eternity, or ‘non-time’ as it is often referred to - and exploring vicissitude in more detail.

## Chapter Three: Eternity, Time and Truth

Past, present, and future - both Chapters One and Two delineate a conception of time that easily divides into such distinctions. As St. Augustine famously remarked, it is through these three divisions that human beings perceive how a time in kind has passed; 'if nothing passes away, there is no past time, and if nothing arrives, there is no future time, and if nothing existed there would be no present time'.<sup>1</sup> Time moves incessantly from future to past and humans move with it; all references to our experience of time on Earth are deeply embedded in the idea that events in time exist either in the past, present or future. Montaigne and Bruno are no different in their understanding of time. Over the last two chapters, their concerns and theories regarding nearly all of the themes discussed so far, including vicissitude, birth, death, fear, and ageing, can only exist in a temporal world - or indeed a universe - in which time is constantly flowing from future to past.<sup>2</sup> At first glance, this may seem to be a rather obvious characteristic of time, with little need for extended commentary within the context of this thesis. However, in the 16th century time co-existed alongside an extremely important concept that arguably represented the opposite of temporal succession, and this concept was known as eternity.

Eternity was a numberless, shapeless and timeless state, utterly devoid of mutability. Time was defined in terms of change, impermanence or 'flow' due to the influence of various ancient Greek thinkers such as Pythagoras, who believed that time derived from this immutable eternity.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Christianity appropriated the concept and labelled eternity 'God's time', an extra-temporal state with neither beginning nor end which symbolised the utter perfection of God. Many 16th-century Scholastics were directly influenced by the definition of eternity found in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*: '[So] just as numbering before and after in change produces the notion of time, so awareness of invariability in something altogether free from change produces the

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> This term is used with caution since there is a long debate surrounding whether time can truly be said to 'flow'. Heraclitus compared time to the act of putting his foot in a river and the stream still passing, an image Montaigne refers to directly in the *Apologie* (II.12.602). For more on the background to this debate see Patrick Henry, 'Montaigne and Heraclitus: Pattern and Flux, Continuity and Change in "Du repentir"', *Montaigne Studies*, 4.1-2 (1992), pp. 7-18; also Françoise Joukovsky, *Le Feu et le Fleuve. Héraclite et la Renaissance française* (Geneva: Droz, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to Pythagorean thought (including time and eternity) see G.S. Kirk, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Charles H. Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006).

notion of eternity'.<sup>4</sup> By comparison, time was considered to be merely a reflection of the eternal, a 'ceaseless lackey to eternity' which belonged to the realm of created, mortal beings.<sup>5</sup> I hope to illustrate that in the 16th century, to discuss eternity was also to discuss God, divinity, and perfection; it was a state of timelessness that contrasted sharply with the impermanence and fluctuation of time itself. This careful distinction between eternity and time helped to define the ontological difference between God the creator and the beings that he created. Consequently, most early modern thinkers were not solely concerned with the measurable, human-oriented time of the past two chapters. Eternity held a significant relationship to time, and any study attempting to understand conceptions of time in the 16th century would be naturally compelled to analyse its timeless counterpart in more detail.

Unlike time itself, eternity was a relatively uncontroversial and unchanging concept within the history of philosophy of time; thus it might appear that Montaigne and Bruno would have had little difficulty in absorbing it into their own conceptions of time. However, eternity occupies an awkward position in the *Essais*. Any attempt to seriously and consistently address a perfect, eternal 'God's time' would undoubtedly have interfered with Montaigne's preferred focus on writing himself, his observations on the passage of time (Chapter One) and his responses to this passage (Chapter Two). Therefore eternity is largely absent from the *Essais* and in the few notable references Montaigne makes to it, he appears to justify his fascination with time's impermanence instead. His deep-seated interest in human time precludes any interest in a key temporal concept of the 16th century. Eternity in the Italian dialogues is arguably more straightforward in some respects since Bruno employs familiar Neoplatonic terms to describe an eternal God. Nevertheless, this God is infused directly into a monist, infinite universe through the World Soul or *anima del mondo*, an idea which is further complicated by Bruno's notion of the infinite duration of vicissitude, an eternal process of its own that contains innumerable temporal parts.

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<sup>4</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. by Timothy McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 210. In Question 10, 'The Eternity of God', Aquinas affirms that 'eternity itself exists as a simultaneous whole, lacking successiveness' (p. 211). See also Michael Edwards, *Time and Science of the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 'Chapter One: Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy'. Edwards states that Aquinas' account was 'influential amongst late renaissance commentators, and was read with particular attention by Jesuit authors' (p. 22). For a similar view of eternity in Augustine's works, see Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Book XI 'Time and Eternity'. Augustine states that 'in the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present' (p. 228). He also describes the Word of the Lord as being coeternal with God, 'you say all that you say in simultaneity and eternity' (p. 226).

<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *Lucrece*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat & Paul Werstine (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), in *Folger Shakespeare Library* <[www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org)> [accessed 21 August 2017].

## Time and Eternity

### *Eternity in the 16th century*

Early modern discussions concerning the nature of time were inextricably linked to eternity. This phenomenon was partly due to the longstanding influence of the Ancient Greeks, whose understanding of eternity lingered well into the 16th century and influenced philosophers and theologians alike. Various Greek philosophers considered time or *chronos* in terms of temporal flux, and this notion was inseparable from eternity. The Pythagorean school of philosophers originated in the 6th century BC; they considered eternity to be ‘a boundless “space” from which *chronos* was drawn and on which it depended for its continuing existence’.<sup>6</sup> Time was an auxiliary of eternity (or ‘the Unlimited’ as it was also known) since the Pythagoreans believed that time derived its existence from this eternal, infinite space. While the Unlimited was ‘shapeless, numberless, and unformed raw material’ with no beginning, end or temporal division in-between, *chronos* was characterised by its clear and continuous passage from future through to past. By the beginning of the 5th century BC, the distinction between time and eternity was already well-established, and it would go on to influence later definitions of time for well over a millennium:

From the beginning, two radically different conceptions - one Hellenistic, the other Hebraic - have dominated the history of Western thought on the subject of time. For the Greeks, time was an essentially quantitative phenomenon, *opposed to eternity* and conceived as a derivative of physical space. For the Hebrews, on the other hand, time, whose ontological status was of no speculative interest, was preeminently qualitative: an historical consciousness of individual events as parts of a providential continuum.<sup>7</sup>

In this section, I will briefly assess the repercussions of this early Hellenistic view of time on later Western thought, first by introducing one of its most famous proponents and secondly by describing its influence on Christian thinkers throughout the Middle Ages and into the late 16th century.

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<sup>6</sup> John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith and Time* (Buffalo, N.Y.: McGill-Queen’s University, 1997), p. 69. For a thorough survey of Pythagoras’ reception in the Renaissance, which includes discussion on the adoption of Pythagorean notions of the eternal, see Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, *Pythagoras and Renaissance Europe: Finding Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Hill, p. 69. Emphasis own. See also Simona Cohen, *Transformations of Time and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 14-15.

Perhaps one of the most well-known definitions of time in Western philosophy appears in Plato's *Timaeus* (c.360 BC), a text which was widely diffused in the 16th century. It was this text that helped to firmly establish Pythagoras' original belief that time and eternity were closely intertwined (see also Chapter One, 'Popular definitions of time in the 16th century').<sup>8</sup> Plato was heavily influenced by these ideas and developed them further in his well-known philosophical dialogue, in which four interlocutors (Timaeus, Socrates, Hermocrates and Critias) are discussing how a Demiurge (*dêmiourgos*) or 'divine Craftsman' originally formed the entire universe.<sup>9</sup> Time is an important aspect of the creation story in the *Timaeus*, and Plato famously defined it as 'a moving image of eternity':

Now it was the Living Thing's nature to be eternal, but it isn't possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten. And so he [the Demiurge] began to think of making a moving image of eternity: at the same time as he brought order to the universe, he would make an eternal image, moving according to number, of eternity remaining in unity. This number, of course, is what we now call "time".<sup>10</sup>

Eternity is unity, oneness, or - as Plato also referred to it - a characteristic of the highest immutable form of 'Being' which is 'indivisible and always changeless'.<sup>11</sup> In line with Pythagoras, Plato reduces time to a form of 'becoming' since it exists solely due to a higher, eternal form which it attempts to mirror through constant movement 'according to number'. Time is thus 'the number or measure of change, the condition of all coming-to-be and passing-away'.<sup>12</sup> Plotinus later echoes these ideas in the third book of his *Enneads* (c. 270 AD), in which he states that 'Eternity and Time, we say, are two different things, the one belonging to the sphere of the nature which lasts forever, the other to that

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<sup>8</sup> The *Timaeus* first gained widespread popularity amongst European readers in the 14th century thanks to a commentary by the 4th century philosopher Calcidius; after a brief lull, from the mid 16th century onwards, secular rulers pressured university scholars into reentering Plato's dialogues into the curriculum. See James Hankins, 'The Study of the *Timaeus* in Early Renaissance Italy', in *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, ed. by A. Grafton & N.G. Siraisi (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 77-119.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen highlights this connection between Plato and Pythagoras: 'Plato, in differentiating between the concepts of time and eternity and establishing their relationship, drew upon Pythagorean precepts' (p. 10).

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, trans. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), p. 1241. In this quotation the 'Living Thing' refers to the created universe.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1239.

<sup>12</sup> Hill, p. 70. See Cohen, p. 44; Cohen argues that time was more closely linked to motion and was itself 'an image perceived of something beyond perception - eternity' (p. 44). See also Hélène Védérine, *La conception de la nature chez Giordano Bruno* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), p. 67.



of becoming and of this universe'.<sup>13</sup> It is also important to note that Plotinus was responsible for developing the concept of the World Soul; as this chapter will demonstrate, the World Soul greatly influenced Bruno and became an integral part of his cosmology. The *anima mundi* was an emanation of the eternal One, and it was through this emanation, which contained all of the individual souls on Earth, that time was supposedly born; 'it is the activity of the World Soul that generates time, and the resulting universe therefore exists, not in that static perfection eternity, but in the mutable succession of time'.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the definitions above, time is different to eternity, and yet it is simultaneously bound to eternity for its very existence as a temporal 'other', an image or reflection of the eternal. Various present-day scholars working in the field of time studies have already recognised that the Roman philosopher Boethius (c.475-524AD) was instrumental in ensuring that the Platonic/Neoplatonic divide between time and eternity existed well into Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> The philosopher and theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) continued to express time in distinctly Platonic terms as 'the unfolding of eternity'<sup>16</sup>; his contemporary Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) ensured that this distinction survived into the 16th century, due in large part to his popular translations and commentaries of Plato and Plotinus (Ficino heavily influenced Bruno's views on the World Soul).<sup>17</sup> By the late 1500s, the core relationship between time and eternity remained highly influential: eternity was believed to be one whole instant in comparison to its

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<sup>13</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. by A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, n.d.) in *Loeb Classical Library* <[www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com)> [accessed 22 August 2017]. For more on Plotinus and the *Essais*, see Françoise Joukovsky, *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (Paris: Nizet, 1972). Plotinus regards time as 'une imitation de l'éternité, et il [temps] est à l'éternité comme l'univers sensible est au monde intelligible' (p. 28). Previous scholars have suggested that Plato's eternity is a state of non-time, the 'absence of time' - Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 31. This debate has raged for many centuries; see Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), '8 - Is Eternity Timelessness?'. Of course, aside from the *Timaieus* and the *Enneads*, other ancient sources also influenced later debates on the nature of eternity. In the *De caelo* Aristotle came close to defining eternity in spatial terms very similar to the Pythagorean definitions above when he described an extra-temporal sphere situated outside of the heavens, which he referred to as *aeon*. See Book 1 chapter 9 of Aristotle's *De caelo* for the definition of *aeon* that would have been familiar to 16th century thinkers.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> 'Boethius...sought to define divine eternity by contrast to temporality' (Cohen, p. 44). See also Miguel A. Granada, 'El concepto de tiempo en Bruno: tiempos cósmicos y eternidad', in *La filosofía di Giordano Bruno: Problemi ermeneutici e storiografici*, ed. by Eugenio Canone (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2003), pp. 85-113 (pp. 94-95). For an excellent study of early modern conceptions of eternity see Luca Bianchi, 'Abiding Then: Eternity of God and Eternity of the World from Hobbes to the *Encyclopédie*', in *The Medieval Concept of Time*, ed. by Pasquale Porro (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 543-560.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Leen Spruit, *Il problema della conoscenza in Giordano Bruno* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1988), p. 189. For the influence of Ficino's commentaries in the *Essais* see Frederick Kellermann, 'Montaigne, Reader of Plato', *Comparative Literature*, 8.4 (1956), pp. 307-322.

auxiliary time, which was characterised as a series of constantly changing instants. Bianchi has recently emphasised that the idea of eternity as ‘timelessness’ was supported well into the late 1500s by extremely diverse groups of philosophers: ‘thinkers belonging to different, often rival, philosophical traditions were prepared to maintain that God does not exist in time and his eternity is a kind of timelessness’.<sup>18</sup> Various late Scholastic thinkers shared this view, as did the Italian Dominican friar Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), and even Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677); Bianchi also identifies Bruno as another Renaissance thinker who helped to sustain an interest in the distinction between time and timeless eternity.<sup>19</sup>

As well as the common distinction between time and eternity, 16th-century thinkers were also interested in several religious and philosophical concepts that were closely related to eternity. While not all of the theories below are strictly eternal in nature, they do describe infinite time or extremely long durations of time. For example, the Scholastics of the Middle Ages and early modern period posited a third temporal division between time and eternity, entitled *aevum*. *Aevum*, sometimes referred to by present-day scholars as ‘angelic time’ was ‘the duration of celestial beings, angels and the rational part of the soul’.<sup>20</sup> Although it was different from eternity since it had a beginning, *aevum* was also distinct from time since it lacked an ending and was the time of other intelligent and immortal beings. Admittedly, Luther and other reformers cast a suspicious eye over the creation of *aevum* since the testimony of Biblical scripture is scant, but he ultimately accepted that angels were in service to God’s divine will for eternity.<sup>21</sup> Other commonplaces of the Christian/Neoplatonic tradition in the early modern period included the immortality of the soul; as I discussed in Chapter One, the soul endured forever and was thus the most divine property of human beings. However, much like *aevum*, many Medieval and Renaissance Christians believed that individual souls were not truly ‘eternal’ since they were also created. This process occurred either through the soul’s transference from parents to their children - just as God breathed life into Adam - or through God himself, whom some Medieval and Renaissance Christians believed was

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<sup>18</sup> Bianchi, p. 555.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 548.

<sup>20</sup> For an introduction see Paolo Ponzio, ‘Tempus, aevum, aeternitas in the Philosophy of Tommaso Campanella’, in *The Medieval Concept of Time*, ed. by Pasquale Porro (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 543-560.

<sup>21</sup> See Philip M. Soergel, ‘Luther on the Angels’ in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 64-82.

responsible for creating new souls daily.<sup>22</sup> The Hellenic concept of metempsychosis, which Bruno explored in his *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*, was considered to be heretical by most Christian theologians since it implied the transmigration of souls after death.

Hellenic ideas of cyclical time and eternity were linked through the concept of endless recurrence. In Antiquity, some philosophers had believed that the whole universe was cyclical - in other words, the universe had a finite lifespan and would eventually end, to be forever replaced by a new universe afterwards. Sorabji describes how 'not just individual persons, but whole worlds will be repeated' and that 'such views are attested for Anaximenes, Anaximander, Heraclitus and Empedocles'.<sup>23</sup> This concept naturally led to the idea of a 'Great Year', which was the date in which the universe would end its current cycle - it is mentioned in Plato's *Republic* (c. 380 BC), and was also postulated by Heraclitus, and it grew to be very popular in the Renaissance.<sup>24</sup> Bruno directly references the 'grande anno' in the Italian dialogues several times, while in 'Des Boyteux' (III.XI) Montaigne describes a similar process to endless recurrence with reference to the leap year, or as he refers to it 'la revolution de tel ou tel nombre d'années' (III.XI.1026) after which 'ce jour extraordinaire seroit tousjours eclipsé' (III.XI.1026).<sup>25</sup> As well as the more straightforward relationship between time and eternity, early modern thinkers were clearly fascinated by near-eternal concepts too.<sup>26</sup> It is important to be aware of all of these

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, Medieval and Renaissance theologians wrestled with certain difficulties attached to the idea of the soul's creation. See Lodi Nauta, 'The Preexistence of the Soul in Medieval Thought', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 63 (1996), pp. 93-135; also R.J. O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Sorabji, p. 182. See Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014). Palmer demonstrates how such thinkers were widely read by commentators and philosophers in the Renaissance, mainly through Lucretius' *De rerum natura* which preserved many of their ideas. For more on the wider transmission of Heraclitus, Anaximander and other pre-Socratics in the ancient world, see Victor Caston & Daniel W. Graham, eds., *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 'Part 5 - Transmissions, Traditions and Reactions'.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. In the Italian dialogues, Bruno makes explicit reference to the Great Year three times - in the *Cena, Spaccio* and the *Furori*. See Paul-Henri Michel, *La cosmologie de Giordano Bruno* (Paris: Hermann, 1962), p. 297. For the heretical implications of this doctrine see Steven Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). 'The monotheists could live with the theme of decay because it was congenial to the doctrine of original sin leading to an end however conceived, but the eternity of the world was for them a nonstarter that Medieval authorities branded as pagan and/or heretical' (p. 13).

<sup>25</sup> Montaigne also names Heraclitus as a proponent of endless recurrence: 'Heraclitus établissoit le monde estre composé par feu et, par l'ordre des destinées, se devoir enflammer et resoudre en feu quelque jour, et quelque jour encore renaistre' (II.XII.572).

<sup>26</sup> Debates emerged concerning how humans might practically be remembered on Earth after their death. A rare instance of the term 'éternité' in the *Essais* sees Montaigne discussing those philosophers who promise 'éternité aux lettres qu'ils écrivent à leurs amis' (I.XL.251). In the *Eroici Furori* Bruno mocks the Petrarchan poets and their quest for immortality: 'destinatemi immortale, fatemi poeta, rendetemi illustre, mentre canto di morte, cipressi et inferni' (*Furori* II.531). Of course, Bruno also complies with the traditions of his age when communicating with his benefactors. For example, in the 'Proemiale epistola' to Michel de Castelnau, Bruno promises that his writing will render 'eterna testimonianza dell'invitto favor vostro' (*De la causa* I.596-597).

interpretations since Montaigne uses them to cast doubt on philosophy's ability to claim truth, while Bruno reveals a fascination with those temporal concepts that were introduced by the pre-Socratics, as opposed to a more conventional interest in Aristotle.

Finally, the longevity attributed to the distinction between time and eternity partly occurred because Christian thinkers managed to easily appropriate aspects of the divide between eternal and temporal to their religion, firmly anchoring eternity to the idea of 'God's time'. Before Ficino, Cusa and even Boethius, St. Augustine had made it very clear that the God of Christianity was an eternal God residing 'outside' Earthly time: 'Lord, eternity is yours'.<sup>27</sup> In the aptly-titled Book XI of his *Confessions*, 'Time and Eternity', Augustine adapts the Platonic conception of eternity and time to his own beliefs. He compares the 'drops of time' that he perceives in everyday life (the 'drops' in question refer to the water clock, steadily counting time) to God's eternity, in which 'nothing is transient, but the whole is present', i.e. there is no such thing as transition from past to present to future; rather eternity is one whole present moment.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, where Christianity is concerned, eternity is a state of time (or non-time) firmly outside the realm of human knowledge:

Who will lay hold on the human heart to make it still, so that I can see how eternity, in which there is neither future nor past, stands still and dictates future and past times? Can my mind have the strength for this? Can the hand of my mouth by mere speech achieve so great a thing?<sup>29</sup>

Eternity is considered to be a state of time that human beings cannot understand - Augustine desires to 'see' eternity but questions whether his mind possesses the strength to comprehend such a radically different state of time, which knows no difference at all between past, present and future.<sup>30</sup> The time that human beings perceive is characterised by a constant flowing between the three temporal divisions, whereas eternity in the *Confessions* is permanent, stable and perhaps most importantly, it is God's time: 'The

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<sup>27</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, p. 221. On the continuation of these beliefs into the Middle Ages see Le Goff, 'Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages'; also Christopher S. Celenza, 'The Revival of Platonic Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 72-96. According to Celenza, 'It was 'a medieval commonplace, inherited from St. Augustine (354-430): that of all the ancient pagan philosophies, Platonism came the closest to Christian truth' (p. 72).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>30</sup> For more on this aspect of time in Augustine, see Duncan Kennedy, *Antiquity and the Meanings of Time: a Philosophy of Ancient and Modern Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013). Kennedy suggests that Augustine is explicitly writing in order to make sense of his relationship with God, who exists outside of time: 'Time, then, is inescapably part of his attempt to know himself and know God, but famously, it is something that bewilders him' (p. 22).

eternal nature of God was incomparable to the nature of man'.<sup>31</sup> Following the publication of the *Confessions* these descriptions only became further entrenched within Christian belief and remained influential well into the 1500s.

Overall, eternity attributed a deeper meaning to human time on Earth; the sense of 'transient' human life, i.e. of life as a temporary way station on the way to heaven and the eternal, was still prevalent well into the 16th century and beyond.<sup>32</sup> However, in his brief article on early modern time, G.F. Waller also identified eternity as the *cliché* modern scholars often relied upon in order to define Renaissance time: '[they] have been content to treat the Renaissance philosophy of time as a continuation of traditional medieval ideas, which set time in the context of a transcendent eternity'.<sup>33</sup> Little has changed in this respect, and eternity is still used by modern scholars of time studies to explain the familiar tropes of transience that are frequently attributed to 16th century time, often without any reference as to whether different branches of Christianity were discussing eternity in opposing ways. Redondi frames the inventions of astronomer Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) and Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) within a dialogue that was reacting primarily to 'quanto era scritto nella Bibbia riguardo alla transitorietà del tutto'.<sup>34</sup> Exploring the image of time in Shakespeare's 'The Winter's Tale', Frederick Kiefer introduces Renaissance Time in familiar tropes, once more emphasising the personified Father Time and his scythe, which represented 'the destructive effects of transience'.<sup>35</sup> By analysing the extent to which Montaigne and Bruno engage with the definitions above, I hope to demonstrate that their conceptions of time possess a somewhat more complicated relationship to eternity, one that defies the scholarly trends I have previously discussed.

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<sup>31</sup> Cohen, p. 44. See also Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). Quinones states that 'God's eternity is not merely one of superior duration to the time of man: it differs by virtue of the simplicity of its nature. Eternity is totally different from succession' (p. 14).

<sup>32</sup> See G.F. Waller, 'Transition in Renaissance Ideas of Time and the Place of Giordano Bruno', *Neophilologus*, 55 (1971), pp. 3-15 (p. 5).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Pietro Redondi, *Storie del tempo* (Rome: Laterza, 2007), p. 103.

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Kiefer, 'The Iconography of Time in "The Winter's Tale"', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 23.3 (1999), pp. 49-64 (p. 50). Georges Poulet was an early critic of this kind of representation. See Georges Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain I* (Paris: Plon et Éditions Du Rocher, 1952), pp. 11-17.

## *Montaigne and eternity*

Previous scholars have minimised the impact of eternity on Montaigne's thought. As Françoise Joukovsky stated on time in the *Essais*, there is no chapter by Montaigne entitled 'Du temps'.<sup>36</sup> In addition, there is certainly no 'De l'éternité'. However, compared to over 500 occurrences of the word 'temps' in the *Essais*, there are only nine occurrences of the word 'éternité' and one of its close equivalent 'aeternité' across the whole three books, and the majority of these instances appear in a single chapter - the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' (II.XII).<sup>37</sup> Consequently, there are not vast amounts of material for scholars to work with in the first place - in the highly comprehensive *Dictionnaire de Montaigne* (2004) edited by Philippe Desan, there is no entry for 'éternité' or any of its related terms. In *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (1972) Joukovsky argued that Montaigne showed little interest in seriously pursuing Neoplatonic ideas of time and eternity, despite owning a copy of Plotinus' *Enneads* himself.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, I briefly highlighted Montaigne's apparent rejection of the soul's immortality and the absence in his writing of any consistent references to an eternal Afterlife.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, eternity (or perhaps more precisely the omission of eternity) in the *Essais* has often been linked to other themes in Montaigne's work - particularly the wider, contentious debate concerning Montaigne's piety - rather than its relationship to time.<sup>40</sup>

In this section, I present how and why eternity seemingly occupies an ambivalent position within the *Essais*, particularly in relation to time. I hope to show that in the 'Apologie' Montaigne frees himself from any preconceived obligation to discuss eternity by aligning it firmly and undeniably with God. This strategy simultaneously allows Montaigne to display an open recognition of familiar 16th-century conceptions of eternity while also justifying his much wider interest in the mutability of time, in what

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<sup>36</sup> Joukovsky, *Montaigne et le problème du temps*, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> There are also 2 occurrences of another variant, 'aeternité' at I.XL.279 and II.XII.549.

<sup>38</sup> Joukovsky, *Montaigne et le problème du temps*, p. 29. It must be noted that Joukovsky relies heavily on Pierre Villey, *Les sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne* (New York: B. Franklin, 1968) to inform her monograph.

<sup>39</sup> Ian Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), p. 70; see also Felicity Green, 'Montaigne's Soul', in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Brian Cummings & Freya Sierhuis (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 99-112.

<sup>40</sup> See Jerry C. Nash, 'The Christian-Humanist Meditation on Man: Denisot, Montaigne, Rabelais, Ronsard, Scève', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 54.2 (1992), pp. 353-371. Nash argues that Montaigne laid the groundwork for an affirmation of faith in God and man, navigating a middle ground amidst the debate over Montaigne's faith. For an introduction to the roots of this debate see René Bady, *Humanisme chrétien dans les lettres françaises: XIV<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1972); an opposing view is laid out by M.A. Screech in the introduction to his English translation. See Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), pp. xiii-xxxix.

René Bady has described as a distinctly human-centred approach to temporality: 'l'humanisme de l'auteur des *Essais* évolue ainsi dangereusement vers un humanisme clos, enfermant l'homme en lui-même et dans les bornes de son destin temporel'.<sup>41</sup> If, as previously stated, Montaigne partially writes in order to pin down the flow of his thoughts in a (moving) self-portrait, then eternity would naturally appear infrequently in the *Essais*. Bady's choice of the word 'dangereusement' is questionable here - I hope to argue that Montaigne's intention is to examine human beings and their world, while avoiding metaphysical questions as much as possible. Attributing eternity to God is one way of putting this question firmly to one side, allowing Montaigne to concentrate on human time. Montaigne himself states that he cannot possess any direct knowledge of eternity and instead his concerns lie primarily with the time he experiences day-to-day, minute-to-minute: 'Je veux représenter le progrès de mes humeurs, et qu'on voye chaque pièce en sa naissance' (II.XXXVII.758).

At the same time, one must acknowledge that eternity appears in some of the most significant parts of the 'Apologie'. Amidst several pages that emphasise the mutability of time on Earth, Montaigne suggests that rational knowledge of God is impossible for human beings, using the nature of eternity as a clear example of this failure. Thus I argue that Montaigne does not reject or attack eternity, but neither does he wholeheartedly respond to it without an ulterior motive in mind. I believe that he firmly and consistently separates time from eternity in order to focus greater attention on his belief - constant throughout much of the *Essais* - that not only his own body but that of everything he sees in Nature, exists in a state of temporal flux. I have already argued that scholarship persistently approaches 16th century time with a religious paradigm which fails to identify differences between branches of Christianity. Furthermore, eternity has often been portrayed by critics as a continuation from the Middle Ages. However, this approach proves to be impossible in the *Essais* since Montaigne's interest in the human perception of time precludes any commentary on central Renaissance conceptions of eternity.

This section examines evidence primarily taken from two chapters of the *Essais* - 'Que philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir' (I.XX) and 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' (II.XII) - with additional quotations from 'De l'expérience' (III.XIII), 'Du repentir' (III.II) and 'De l'inconstance de nos actions' (II.I). The first two chapters are perhaps Montaigne's most well-known pieces of work. An initial draft of 'Que

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<sup>41</sup> Nash, p. 355.

philosopher, *c'est apprendre à mourir*' was probably written around 1572 and the title itself refers to a translated line from the 26th letter Seneca wrote to Lucilius.<sup>42</sup> Montaigne embraces the spirit of this maxim by assembling a wide range of ancient and contemporary sources, 'une mosaïque d'exemples et d'allégations' that seek to convince the reader of the need to confront death at every turn.<sup>43</sup> The 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' is also well-known as the longest chapter in the *Essais*: 'passant de 150 pages dans l'édition de 1580 à 120 pages in-folio dans l'édition de 1595'.<sup>44</sup> While it has proved difficult to pinpoint the exact date of the first draft, the 'Raimond Sebond' of the title has been rather more easily identified as the Spanish author of the *Theologia naturalis* (c.1434), a Latin work that Montaigne had been asked to translate into French by his father.

The 'Apologie' was initially written as a response to Sebond's *Theologia*, in which Sebond attempted to reconcile philosophy and theology by claiming that nature, like the Bible, was a form of divine revelation. In reality, the 'Apologie' became a much larger project, which saw Montaigne systematically question any and all human claims to know the truth about nature.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the 'Apologie' has been labelled a sign of a sceptical crisis, the centre of all reflection in the *Essais* and an account of Pyrrhonism that dismantles any human claims to epistemological certainty.<sup>46</sup> Why did Montaigne write such a chapter? Influenced by Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Scepticism, the 'Apologie' is probably Montaigne's most profound statement on the overarching problem he perceives as he sits in his tower reading and writing.<sup>47</sup> Human opinion has generated a multitude of philosophies that all claim to know truth - Pythagoreanism, Stoicism, Scepticism, Atomism, and many other 'isms'. Consequently, how can one reliably claim to know the 'real' truth? Throughout this discussion, Montaigne portrays a restless image of humanity, one in a constant search for the truth which only generates further

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<sup>42</sup> See notes to 'Que philosopher' by Jean Balsamo, in *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonen (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 1358.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, p. 63. 'Il [Montaigne] juxtapose plusieurs définitions de nature puisées dans les écrits de certains anciens de sorte qu'elles s'infirmement mutuellement' (p. 63).

<sup>46</sup> See John O'Brien, 'Montaigne and Antiquity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. by Ullrich Langer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 53-73 (p. 60); also Elaine Limbrick, 'Was Montaigne Really a Pyrrhonian?', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 39 (1977), pp. 67-80; Ann Hartle, 'Montaigne and Skepticism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. by Ullrich Langer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 183-207.

<sup>47</sup> On Montaigne and Sextus Empiricus, see Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 'Sextus Empiricus'; Richard E. Flathman, 'The Self Against and for Itself: Montaigne and Sextus Empiricus on Freedom, Discipline and Resistance', *The Monist*, 83.4 (2000), pp. 491-529.



uncertainty. There is time which brings perpetual change, and alongside this there is also the perpetual knowledge generated by human beings, evolving and changing and conflicting: ‘cette infinie confusion d’opinions qui se void entre les philosophes mesmes, et ce debat perpetuel et universel en la connoissance des choses’ (II.XII.562-563). Within the final pages of the ‘Apologie’ this state of affairs contrasts heavily with eternity which, as we have seen, was supposed to represent the absolute truth of God.

I have stated that the vast majority of instances involving the term ‘éternité’ and its variants (‘éternité’, ‘eternel’, ‘aeternité’) appear in the ‘Apologie de Raimond Sebond’ and it is here that Montaigne first broaches the subject of eternity by addressing some of the standard associations of his age. A rare example of Montaigne discussing specifically Christian ideas of the afterlife appears in his remark that ‘les Chrestiens ont une particuliere cognoissance combien la curiosité est un mal naturel et originel en l’homme’ (II.XII.498). Consequently Montaigne derides what he perceives as a growing interest in science which can only lead to eternal damnation; the author claims that Christians view the advancement of *sagesse* and *science* as ‘la premiere ruine du genre humain; [...] la voye par où il [le genre humain] s’est precipité à la damnation eternelle’ (II.XII.498). Furthermore, on learning about God through Nature, Montaigne alludes to the ‘Book of Nature’ by paraphrasing St. Paul. The ‘Book of Nature’ - a popular concept in the Middle Ages - was the idea that Nature makes present God’s invisible ways to human beings: ‘Les choses invisibles de Dieu, dit saint Paul, apparoissent par la creation du monde, considerant sa sapience eternelle et sa divinité par ses oeuvres’ (II.XII.447).<sup>48</sup> Nature is a created being which acts as an earthly reminder of the divine knowledge of God. In the *Essais*, it is arguably easiest to begin by listing the few instances above in which Montaigne does refer to eternity in a more familiar 16th-century context. Through the use of such remarks, Montaigne directly alludes to the standard religious framework of the late 1500s - God is eternal and so is his knowledge, while time on Earth is a created reflection of his superior being.

However, the ‘Apologie’ is a chapter that consistently draws on a wide variety of philosophical sources in order to explore the infinite claims to truth endlessly generated by human beings. Eternity is not exempt from this pursuit. Alongside the standard religious conceptions of his own age, Montaigne relates all of the various ways in which philosophers have attempted to express the eternal. In one section, he begins by remarking that the Greco-Roman geographer Ptolemy had already claimed to have

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<sup>48</sup> For background on the idea of the Book of Nature see Epstein, ‘1 - The Discovery of Nature’; also Wesley M. Stevens, *Cycles of Time and Scientific Learning in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995).

mapped the entire world and consequently casts doubt over the claims of his 16th-century contemporaries - 'les Geographes de ce temps' (II.XII.572) - that the whole world had been discovered. Montaigne soon widens his discussion to include not only absolute claims about space but also time on Earth. Many familiar eternal concepts emerge here as Montaigne briefly refers to 'la creance d'Aristote sur l'Eternité de l'ame' (II.XII.504), as well as the belief in the sempiternity of the world held by Aristotle, Cicero and others 'que la naissance du monde est indéterminée' (II.XII.572). Of course, this idea was deeply heretical because Christianity believed that the world was created, it was not sempiternal. Montaigne also lists ancient ideas of infinite succession concerning the Earth 'qu'il est, de toute eternité, mortel et renaissant à plusieurs vicissitudes' (II.XII.572); even the idea that some Greeks held concerning an eternal God at the centre of the Earth, 'divin, tres-heureux, tres-grand, tres-sage, eternel' (II.XII.572).<sup>49</sup> In line with Montaigne's initial criticism of Ptolemy and the 16th-century geographers, the lengthy listing of all of these definitions of eternity only serves to completely undermine their validity when they appear one after the other - knowledge is open-ended and surpasses an individual's lifetime; after all, it moves towards an inexhaustible future.

Montaigne criticises such definitions of eternity when every philosophy from Stoicism to Aristotelianism has laid claim to absolute truth: 'vaut il pas mieux se tenir hors de cette meslée?' (II.XII.504). Surely it is better for humans to avoid such debates altogether? Besides, Montaigne complains that human beings cannot even claim to know themselves, let alone eternity: 'l'homme n'est non plus instruit de la connoissance de soy en la partie corporelle qu'en la spirituelle' (II.XII.557). In 'De l'exercitation', Montaigne wryly observed that philosophers cannot come back from the dead to inform others of the nature of death, but thinkers have still tried to describe it anyway.<sup>50</sup> Much the same might be said of eternity - philosophers cannot experience eternity or witness the stars rolling above their heads forever, but they have still tried to articulate this process anyway. Yet Montaigne pointedly criticises any human attempt to define the eternal - eternity has always been strongly linked to the divine and in the 'Apologie' it is not something that humans can claim to have any knowledge of, no matter which school of philosophy they derive from.

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<sup>49</sup> 'Tel estude fut celui du jeune Caton sentant sa fin prochaine, qui se rencontra au discours de Platon, de l'éternité de l'ame. Non, comme il faut croire, qu'il ne fut de long temps garny de toute sorte de munition pour un tel deslogement; d'assurance, de volonté ferme et d'instruction il en avoit plus que Platon n'en a en ses escrits: sa science et son courage estoient, pour ce regard, au dessus de la philosophie' (II.XXVIII.703).

<sup>50</sup> 'Il s'est trouvé anciennement des hommes si excellens mesnagers du temps, qu'ils ont essayé en la mort mesme de la gouter et savourer, et ont bandé leur esprit pour voir que c'estoit de ce passage, mais ils ne sont pas revenus nous en dire les nouvelles' (II.VI.371).

This approach underlies much of Montaigne's subsequent discussion concerning the nature of eternity. In many passages, he emphasises his insistence on our inability to comprehend eternity by focusing on the limitations of human language. Ascertaining the truth of what time is can be difficult enough, because as Montaigne remarks 'aller selon nature, pour nous, ce n'est qu'aller selon nostre intelligence, autant qu'elle peut suyvre et autant que nous y voyons' (II.XII.526). The Pyrrhonian Sceptic Sextus Empiricus believed that all discussion of time results in nonsense, nothing certain can be known about it since neither future nor past truly exists, while the present eludes human beings.<sup>51</sup> Proceeding from the idea that one must be reliant on one's senses in order to know a time which - according to Empiricus - may not even exist, Montaigne wonders how humans can presume to define even a single lifetime. He asks: 'car pourquoy prenons nous titre d'estre, de cet instant qui n'est qu'une eloise dans le cours infini d'une nuict eternelle, et une interruption si briefve de nostre perpetuelle et naturelle condition?' (II.XII.526) 'Estre' is compared to an instant, but it is not the popular Platonic idea of eternity as an instant, instead human life is an instant within 'le cours infini d'une nuict eternelle'. Time endures while humans exist for a comparatively brief duration. Death is a 'durée infinie et perpetuelle' (II.XII.549) and human beings deal in measures of time that pale in comparison to this duration: 'un temps si court, qui est à l'avanture d'une ou de deux heures, ou, au pis aller, d'un siecle, qui n'a non plus de proportion à l'infinité qu'un instant' (II.XII.549). In the 'Apologie' human lives are reduced to an instant within a period of time that it is impossible to imagine.

As a result of the difficulties that emerge when humans attempt to express their existence in time, Montaigne criticises the way in which people then try and evaluate God's time in such terms:

Il m'a tousjours semblé qu'à un homme Chrestien cette sorte de parler est pleine d'indiscretion et d'irreverance: Dieu ne peut mourir, Dieu ne se peut desdire, Dieu ne peut faire cecy ou cela. Je ne trouve pas bon d'enfermer ainsi la puissance divine sous les loix de nostre parolle. (II.XII.527)

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<sup>51</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, p. 234. The non-existence of past time and future time proves to be a conundrum for Augustine, which leads to issues regarding the nature of the present: 'If we can think of some bit of time which cannot be divided into even the smallest instantaneous moments, that alone is what we can call 'present'. And this time flies so quickly from future into past that it is an interval with no duration. If it has duration, it is divisible into past and future. But the present occupies no space' (p. 232). Chadwick notes that this is a summary of older philosophical arguments which state that only time's indivisibility remains. In Albert Ahmeti, *De la peinture du temps dans les 'Essais' de Montaigne* (Paris: Books On Demand, 2014), Ahmeti notes that Empiricus 'soulève le caractère existant et non existant du temps' ('Résurgences pyrrhoniennes').

At first glance, this may appear to be a fervently devout passage, mirroring St. Augustine by deriding our pretension to articulate a state of timelessness that is so utterly alien to us. However, unlike Augustine - who suggests that there may be aspects of nature we can learn about - Montaigne completely absolves himself of worrying about something that his own words cannot and supposedly should not express. Philippe Desan has previously stated that Montaigne was well-read in St. Paul and St. Augustine, but his response to these traditional Christian works often came in direct conflict with the official canonic interpretation.<sup>52</sup> Here the idea of one's inability to express God in human terms is further underlined by Montaigne's attempt at describing the nature of eternity:

Quand nous disons que l'infinité des siecles tant passez qu'avenir, n'est à Dieu qu'un instant; que sa bonté, sapience, puissance sont mesme chose avecques son essence, nostre parole le dict, mais nostre intelligence ne l'apprehende point.  
(II.XII.528)

These are just words - human words that cannot comprehend the time that they are trying (very poorly) to express: 'nostre parole le dict, mais nostre intelligence ne l'apprehende point'. Again this quotation initially appears to be a fairly traditional reference to Christian-Neoplatonic ideas of eternity - 'l'infinité des siecles...n'est à Dieu qu'un instant' - and yet it is framed by Montaigne's concern with what is within the power of humans to express about temporality. He is arguably creating a pretext in order to avoid having to discuss eternity in too much detail; the closing pages of the 'Apologie' only serve to convince Montaigne of the need to focus on the time that his senses can directly apprehend. As Joukovsky has stated, 'Il (Montaigne) constate ce qui nous est donné: non pas l'être éternel, mais le temps, qui est l'élément premier de notre expérience'.<sup>53</sup> I argue that eternity in the *Essais* inevitably returns to humanity; discussion of the nature of the eternal frequently leads to a reflection on human time and our limitations in articulating it. Montaigne often disguises these concerns using traditional Christian Neoplatonic images of eternity or adopting familiar language derived from the works of St. Augustine. However, his originality lies in using such language to make an alternative point regarding the impossibility - and thus futility - of articulating the eternal.

Finally, one must note that the very last pages of the 'Apologie' are almost 'a word for word translation of a passage from "The E at Delphi," a chapter in Plutarch's

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<sup>52</sup> Philippe Desan, 'Introduction' in *Dieu à notre commerce et société: Montaigne et la théologie*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Geneva: Droz, 2008), pp. 7-10 (p. 9).

<sup>53</sup> Joukovsky, *Problème du temps*, p. 100.

*Moralia*'.<sup>54</sup> In this text Plutarch attempted to define the letter E, the fifth letter of the Greek alphabet which - amongst various other definitions - was also the word for the second person singular of the verb 'to be'. That Montaigne drew extensively upon this source alludes to a wider concern with attempting to pin down the essence of human being in time. Montaigne first emphasises human temporality and its impermanence: '[Et] nous, et nostre jugement, et toutes choses mortelles, vont coulant et roulant sans cesse' (II.XII.601). He reiterates his belief in the idea that both our physical bodies and also our inner faculties - 'nostre jugement' - are in constant flux, along with everything else in the world. Montaigne also highlights ways in which classical philosophers have expressed human impermanence: 'Platon disoit que les corps n'avoient jamais existence, ouy bien naissance' (II.XII.601); Pythagoras, as we saw in Chapter Two, believed that 'toute matiere est coulante et labile' (II.XII.602); the Stoics deny that the present moment exists and instead view time as 'la jointure et assemblage du futur et du passé' (II.XII.602). All of these philosophies offer different approaches to the question of time's seeming instability. Consequently, human beings are condemned to a lifetime of futile attempts to establish certainty in an uncertain world: 'Ainsin il ne se peut establir rien de certain de l'un à l'autre, et le jugeant et le jugé estans en continuelle mutation et branle' (II.XII.601). Montaigne denies that humans may ever be able to transcend time and access divine knowledge, since they face enough difficulties in confronting temporal flux. Instead, he employs distinctly Platonic terms in order to refer to God as the 'estre' while humans have always existed between 'le naistre et le mourir':

Ainsin, estant toutes choses subjectes à passer d'un changement en autre, la raison, y cherchant une reelle subsistance, se trouve deceue, ne pouvant rien apprehender de subsistant et permanent, par ce que tout ou vient en estre et n'est pas encore du tout, ou commence à mourir avant qu'il soit nay. (II.XII.602)

While Montaigne does not explicitly align these particular remarks with Plato, the final lines of this quotation echo Platonic ideas of 'Becoming' - everything is coming into being and yet will never truly be at all, and begins to die before it is even born.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, everything mortal that has a beginning in time cannot reach a state of Being in the eternal sense: 'ce qui commence à naistre ne parvient jamais jusques à perfection d'estre' (II.XII.602). However, Montaigne is untroubled by this concern and

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<sup>54</sup> Henry, p. 8. See also Plutarch, *Moralia. The E at Delphi*, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, n.d.) in *Loeb Classical Library* <[www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com)> [accessed 31 August].

<sup>55</sup> In this passage Montaigne borrows directly from Plato's *Theaetetus*. See Plato, *Complete Works*, trans. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 'Theaetetus'.

instead goes on to describe the idea of temporal flux in terms of its effect on an individual human being through birth, ageing, to death:

Comme de semence humaine se fait premierement dans le ventre de la mere un fruct sans forme, puis un enfant formé, puis, estant hors du ventre, un enfant de mammelle; apres il devient garson; puis consequemment un jouvenceau; apres un homme fait; puis un homme d'aage; à la fin decrepité vieillard. (II.XII.602)

Such is the life of a human being. Recalling the natural order of time from Chapter One, Montaigne emphasises that humans divide their time into distinct stages or measurements, referring to birth and death as in the above quotation, or indeed minutes or hours, and even 'before' and 'after': 'Car c'est chose mobile que le temps [...] à qui appartiennent ces mots: devant et apres, et a esté ou sera' (II.XII.603). Here Montaigne illustrates two of the three temporal divisions - past and future - but omits any mention of the present moment. In light of Montaigne's reference to Stoicism above, this absence may well allude to the well-known concerns of the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus (279 BC-206 BC) who denied the existence of the present moment; responding to Aristotle's association of time with duration he claimed that 'if every duration is divisible into an infinite number of parts, the present moment will never truly be present'.<sup>56</sup> Instead, Montaigne prefers to emphasise the continuous movement between things that will be and things that were, reinforcing the idea of human temporality in flux. Any attempt by Montaigne to explore the nature of eternity merely betrays his fascination with expressing the complexity of human time instead. There are no hollow words in the *Essais* which praise the excellence of God's time; instead, Montaigne uses well-known discussions of eternity - in this case, an excerpt from Plutarch's *Moralia* - in order to pursue his objective of documenting the changing self in time.

After devoting many pages within this extraordinarily long chapter to illustrating the utter instability of human claims to truth, which has now been exacerbated by a lengthy examination of the infinitely divisible, constantly flowing nature of time itself, Montaigne finally asks what can we ever reliably say 'is'? 'Mais qu'est-ce donc qui est veritablement?' (II.XII.603). He responds with the following definition of eternity: 'Ce qui est eternal, c'est à dire qui n'a jamais eu de naissance, ny n'aura jamais fin; à qui le temps n'apporte jamais aucune mutation' (II.XII.603). Humans try to express what 'is' with terms such as 'present, instant, maintenant, par lesquels il semble que

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<sup>56</sup> Marta Cristiani, 'Augustine of Hippo and the new Christian culture' in *Ancient Philosophy: Textual Paths and Historical Explorations*, ed. by Lorenzo Perilli & Daniela P. Taormina (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017), pp. 677-738 (p. 693).

principalement nous soustenons et fondons l'intelligence du temps' (II.XII.603) but again, like the Stoics and the Sceptics and other philosophers before them, this only highlights the impossibly shifting and flowing nature of human time. How does one record the flux and flow of their thoughts in the present if it is impossible to define the present moment adequately? 'Montaigne had clearly seen that the characteristic property of the creature is impermanence. No creature ever is: a creature is always shifting, changing, becoming'.<sup>57</sup> Montaigne concludes the chapter with a description of God couched once more in human definitions of temporality:

Parquoy il faut conclurre que Dieu seul est, non point selon aucune mesure du temps, mais selon une eternité immuable et immobile, non mesurée par temps, ny subjecte à aucune declinaison; devant lequel rien n'est, ny ne sera apres, ny plus nouveau ou plus recent, ains un realement estant, qui, par un seul maintenant emplit le tousjours; et n'y a rien qui veritablement soit que luy seul, sans qu'on puisse dire: Il a esté, ou: Il sera; sans commencement et sans fin. (II.XII.603)

Thus the only certain thing and true is what is eternal. God is, and he is in a way that humans will never understand or experience, 'selon aucune mesure du temps'. Common time markers do not apply to God's existence, rather Montaigne returns to the idea of God as a present whole, 'par un seul maintenant emplit le tousjours'. Joukovsky rightly argues that with these passages Montaigne severs time from eternity.<sup>58</sup> It is certainly true that he places eternity outside of human mental capacity: 'Dieu seul est', '[il] n'y a rien qui veritablement soit que luy seul'. At the same time, the three tenses that are so intimate to our understanding of time clearly do not apply to eternity.

Furthermore, Montaigne is not interested in 'reaching' eternity in the same way as Augustine in the *Confessions*. As Marie-Madeleine de La Garandière claims, in the 'Apologie' 'l'éternité est ici tout autre chose qu'un *sempiternum* ou un *infinitum tempus*. Elle est d'un autre ordre. Elle est à proprement parler la transcendance'.<sup>59</sup> However, eternity is not something that Montaigne himself wishes to try and experience. Instead he repeats the same descriptions of time and the eternal in order to reinforce his conviction that human time is characterised by instability and impermanence. Montaigne is content

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<sup>57</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. xxxix. In *The Complete Essays* Screech interprets this section from a Christian-Platonic point of view: 'The Platonic background to such a conclusion - unlike the purely Pyrrhonian one - enabled Montaigne to pass from the impermanence of the ever changing creature to what he presents as a 'most pious' concept of the Godhead, accessible to purely human reason: the Creator must have those qualities which Man as creature lacks: he must have unity, not diversity; absolute Being, not mere 'becoming'. And since he created Time he must be outside it and beyond it' (p. xxxix).

<sup>58</sup> See Joukovsky, *Problème du temps*, p. 122.

<sup>59</sup> De La Garandière, p. 195.

to leave eternity to one side since he believes that the most reliable knowledge human beings can access is knowledge of oneself and ‘les sens sont le commencement et la fin de l’humaine cognoissance’ (II.XII.588).<sup>60</sup> As Montaigne states towards the end of ‘De l’experience’, ‘Je ne touche pas icy et ne mesle point à cette marmaille d’hommes que nous sommes et à cette vanité de desirs et cogitations qui nous divertissent, ces ames venerables, eslevées par ardeur de devotion et religion à une constante et consciencieuse meditation des choses divines’ (III.XIII.III4). Within a series of lengthy passages that highlight the flux and flow of human time, eternity is firmly placed outside of this process and presented as a state of timelessness that human beings could not attempt to comprehend. If we accept the critical premise that the ‘Apologie’ is the centre of reflection in the *Essais* then eternity - a central concept within Renaissance ideas of time - possesses a strange status within Montaigne’s writing. It is a concept that he clearly feels obliged to address, since he dwells on its relationship to time extensively in the final pages of the ‘Apologie’, but it is simultaneously a concept which has little bearing on his ultimate desire to map himself over time.

Temporality in the *Essais* almost always favours a focus on the most immediate indicators of time that are easily comprehensible to human beings - nature, the human body, our mental and emotional responses to time. In complete opposition to eternity, time in the *Essais* is always referred to in terms of unceasing flux. We have already begun to gain a sense of the connection between time and impermanence in the ‘Apologie’ with Montaigne’s reference to the stars and sea: ‘la lumiere eternelle de ces flambeaux roulans si fierement sur sa teste, les mouvemens espouvantables de cette mer infinie’ (II.XII.450). The physical, natural world only serves to confirm the constant change that human beings exist within - mutation is a foundation of ‘nostre perpetuelle et naturelle condition’ (II.XII.526).<sup>61</sup> In a poetic image describing the various stages of human life, Montaigne refers to the ‘branle de mes quatre saisons’ (I.XX.94), which further connects the human perception of changes to the natural world with their own understanding of time. The word ‘branle’ reappears frequently, and in this case, it refers to humans in time and their existence between the ‘four seasons’ - ‘l’enfance, l’adolescence, la virilité et la vieillesse du monde’ (I.XX.93-94). In the opening lines of ‘Du repentir’ Montaigne

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Il ne peut fuir que les sens ne soient les souverains maistres de sa cognoissance; mais ils sont incertains et falsifiables à toutes circonstances. C’est là où il se faut battre à outrance, et, si les forces justes nous faillent, comme elles font, y employer l’opiniastreté, la temerité, l’impudence’ (II.XII.592).

<sup>61</sup> Ahmeti notes that Montaigne often uses water imagery when describing human existence. Trying to find constancy becomes very difficult: ‘Tout comme l’eau s’échappe du creux des mains, la constance échappe à toute pensée qui tente de la saisir’ (‘2.2 L’inconstance humaine et le présent insaisissable’).



further considers both himself and the world around him to be constantly changing: ‘Le monde n’est qu’une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse’ (III.II.804). In a clear return to the concept of embodied time, Montaigne follows these remarks with various descriptions of both natural and man-made phenomena which echo previous examples by Bruno in Chapter One: ‘la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d’Aegypte, et du branle public et du leur’ (III.II.804). Again Montaigne draws upon the term ‘branle’ and its variants in order to describe the perpetual movement of all things in time; Randle Cotgrave’s 1611 dictionary translates it as ‘a stirring, an uncertain and inconstant motion’. Ironically, throughout the *Essais* temporal impermanence is one of the few things one can reliably say does not change about how Montaigne views the world: ‘Finalement, il n’y a aucune constante existence, ny de nostre estre, ny de celuy des objects’ (II.XII.601).

Montaigne’s descriptions of *mutation* often resound strikingly with Bruno’s conception of *mutazione*, particularly when we consider his discussions of natural phenomena in more detail. Montaigne often employs the term *mutation* when describing the natural world. ‘*La mutation* des saisons, des vents, des vivres, des humeurs’ (I.XLIII.270) is a simple fact of life; in ‘De la vanité’ Montaigne remarks that ‘*la mutation* d’air et de climat ne me touche point; tout Ciel m’est un’ (III.IX.974). Furthermore, in ‘De trois commerces’ Montaigne states that ‘la vie est un mouvement inégal, irrégulier, et multiforme’ (III.III.819). In the ‘Apologie’ ‘la terre, la mer, les astres, qui s’entretiennent d’une harmonieuse et perpetuelle agitation et danse divine’ (II.XII.572) are specifically defined by their impermanence. In ‘Des Cannibales’ Montaigne makes an explicit connection between flux and time with his reference to the ‘succession de temps’ of various natural phenomena, a phrase which resounds with Bruno’s belief in the ‘*mutazion vicissitudinale del tutto*’. In the same chapter, Montaigne famously observes a river near to his estate - ‘ma riviere de Dordogne’ (I.XXXI.204) - and the impressions it has made on the nearby riverbank over time:

Il semble qu’il y aye des mouvemens, naturels les uns, les autres fievreux, en ces grands corps comme aux nostres. Quand je considere l’impression que ma riviere de Dordogne faict de mon temps vers la rive droicte de sa descente, et qu’en vingt ans elle a tant gaigné, et desrobé le fondement à plusieurs bastimens, je vois bien que c’est une agitation extraordinaire: car, si elle fut tousjours allée ce train, ou deut aller à l’advenir, la figure du monde seroit renversée. Mais il leur prend des changements: tantost elles s’espencent d’un costé, tantost d’un autre; tantost elles se contiennent. (I.XXXI.204)

For twenty years, Montaigne notes the various changes that the river has made to the adjoining bank due to its ‘mouvemens, naturels les uns, les autres fievreux’. Furthermore, all of these movements balance out over time - as Montaigne states, if the river kept eroding the bank in this manner ‘la figure du monde seroit renversée’. However, the changes balance one another out ‘tantost elles s’espèdent d’un costé, tantost d’un autre’. Again this idea resounds with a wider characteristic of vicissitude that Bruno explores in more detail in *De l’infinito*; due to the process of mutation over time, everything passes in and out of the vacuum of space, always mutating within a process ‘per cui cosa non è di male da cui non s’esca, cosa non è di buono a cui non s’incorra, mentre per l’infinito campo, per la perpetua mutazione, tutta la sustanza persevera medesima ed una’ (*Infinito* II.24). Recalling the idea of the spinning ‘ruota del tempo’, Bruno describes a process of perpetual mutation over time that always balances things out, in much the same way that Montaigne’s description of nature ascribes a general order and equilibrium to the ever-changing world around us.

Impermanence, mutation, flux: these terms are central to Montaigne’s conception of time. Eternity remains absent throughout the three books while time is described through temporal flux. Indeed, Montaigne arguably gains comfort not from the idea of a time after death, but instead that his death is a part of time, and not just of his own time but time in the temporal universe: ‘C’est la condition de vostre creation, c’est une partie de vous que la mort: vous vous fuyez vous mesmes’ (I.XX.92); ‘vostre mort est une des pieces de l’universe’ (I.XX.92). This passage is followed by another quotation from Lucretius, who believed in an unceasing flux or *clinamen* which dictated the existence of all things in time. Montaigne modifies the original Latin quotation from *De rerum natura* in order to state the following: ‘Mortals live dependent on one another...and like runners pass on the torch of life’.<sup>62</sup> In Chapters One and Two I argued that Bruno’s conception of time was influenced partly by atomists such as Lucretius. Montaigne is also fascinated by the impermanence of time and arguably takes his influence from similar sources; Henri Estienne’s translation of Heraclitus’ fragments, followed by Amyot’s translation of the *Moralia* by Plutarch in 1572, led to a widespread interest in Heraclitean flux and similar theories. Indeed, Terence Cave attributes temporal flux in the *Essais* to Heraclitus: ‘His vision of the constant flux of the world and of human consciousness is not derived from Pyrrhonism, [...] but from a tradition of ancient thought associated in particular with

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<sup>62</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, n.d.) in *Loeb Classical Library* <[www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com)>, Book II, line 75 [accessed 5 September 2017]. The original Latin reads: ‘sic rerum summa novatur/semper, et inter se mortales mutua vivunt:/augescunt aliae gentes, aliae minuuntur, inque brevi spatio mutantur saecula animantum et quasi cursores vitae lampada tradunt’ (p. 100).

Heraclitus'.<sup>63</sup> Also referring to the atomists and time, Joukovsky claims that 'Montaigne est sans doute l'auteur de la Renaissance qui s'abandonne le plus à cette mobilité universelle'.<sup>64</sup> Religious institutions had severely condemned atomism throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Despite provocative attempts by Fracastoro and Telesio to introduce atomic conceptions of matter into mainstream thought, Hilary Gatti argues that it was Bruno's Italian dialogues which eventually influenced the widespread 17th-century interest in atomism.<sup>65</sup> As I hope to have demonstrated above, Montaigne adapts elements of this unique philosophy into his own writing. According to the *Essais* the entire world 'ce n'est que branle et inconstance' (II.I.333), which resounds strikingly with Bruno's belief in 'la vicissitudine delle cose'. Temporal flux affects everything that exists in the natural world - the seasons, animals, plants, the tides, the setting and rising of the sun.

In conclusion, time in both the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues is defined by impermanence, and this impermanence affects not only human beings but all things in nature. For Montaigne, eternity is a subject which must remain outside the realms of human study.<sup>66</sup> Simona Cohen states that natural philosophers in the 15th and 16th centuries were debating time and eternity while drawing on a combination of influences including Aristotle and 'the revival of Neoplatonism'.<sup>67</sup> Cohen also suggests that on an everyday level people were internalising their responses to these debates - I believe that Montaigne's reversal of eternity as a means to understanding human time is one example of this. Montaigne is interested in how time connects human beings to the world around them; not only human bodies, but *everything* is in constant flux, from emotions to judgement to desires. Embodied time reemerges as central to Montaigne's understanding of time; here it is not only defined by a physical process from birth through ageing to death, but its constant change - which in some ways resembles ancient and unconventional atomic theories - connects humans directly to the workings of Nature

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<sup>63</sup> Terence Cave, *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta, 2007), p. 43. Joukovsky has shown that the pre-Socratics and particularly Heraclitus soared in popularity in the final quarter of the 16th century (p. 8). However, Henry disagrees with Cave and Joukovsky - see p. 14 for his argument explaining why Montaigne was probably not influenced greatly by Heraclitus.

<sup>64</sup> Joukovsky, p. 9. This statement can certainly be debated considering the discussion on Bruno in Chapters One and Two of this thesis.

<sup>65</sup> Hilary Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno* (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> See Michel Magnien, 'Un homme un livre' in Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, p. xix. Magnien says that Montaigne believes eternity to be 'un estude privilege' thus 'le divin doit à ses yeux rester hors du champ d'expérimentation du sujet' (p. xix).

<sup>67</sup> Cohen, p. 115.

and natural bodies in time. Ironically, temporal flux (or discontinuity) emerges as a continuous feature of time in the *Essais*. As we will see, this has serious repercussions for his attempts to portray himself and to pin down these perceptions through the medium of writing - the *Essais* are not a still life portrait, they are a moving portrait - they have to be due to the nature of time.

### *Bruno and eternity*

In the *Essais* eternity is not an integral part of Montaigne's reflection on time since it is not something that Montaigne should ever or could ever try and understand. However, in the Italian dialogues, eternity occupies a much more centralised position within Bruno's conception of time. In stark comparison to Montaigne, Bruno's understanding of eternity has received a considerable amount of attention from scholars working within the field of Bruno studies.<sup>68</sup> However, he does not define eternity as a single, extra-temporal entity that surrounds the cosmos, because in Bruno's cosmology 'everything was a direct emanation from Him'.<sup>69</sup> Instead, eternity in Bruno's texts is composed of several different layers.

First, eternity relates to Bruno's interpretation of endless recurrence, in which he believed that throughout human history, entire epochs existed in the light of 'good' knowledge or the shadows of 'dark' Aristotelian-Scholastic knowledge.<sup>70</sup> Bruno portrayed himself in his writing as a metaphorical prophet of 'la vera filosofia' because he wanted to convey the idea that time in the 16th century was returning to a period of light in which the infinite universe - once postulated by Epicurus, Democritus and various pre-Socratics - would be universally accepted once more: 'ciò che oggi appare "nuovo" non è altro che

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<sup>68</sup> See Michele Ciliberto, 'Infinito e tempo nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno', in *Filosofia del tempo*, ed. by Luigi Ruggiu (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), pp. 96-111; M.A. Granada, 'The Concept of Time in Giordano Bruno: Cosmic times and Eternity'; Granada, 'Mersenne's Critique of Giordano Bruno's Conception of the Relation between God and the Universe: A Reappraisal', *Perspectives on Science*, 18.1 (2010), pp. 26-49; Dilwyn Knox, 'Bruno: Immanence and Transcendence in *De la causa, principio et uno*, Dialogue II', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 19.2 (2003), pp. 463-482.

<sup>69</sup> Giuseppe Candela, 'An Overview of the Cosmology, Religion and Philosophical Universe of Giordano Bruno', *Italica*, 75.3 (1998), pp. 348-364 (p. 348).

<sup>70</sup> This topic has already received ample attention from critics. See Paul-Henri Michel, Chapter Ten, 'Temps et éternité'; Spruit, Chapter Two, 'L'anno del mondo e l'anno umano'; Pasquale Sabbatino, *Giordano Bruno e la "mutazione" del Rinascimento* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1993); Sabbatino, *A l'infinito m'ergo: Giordano Bruno e il volo del moderno Ulisse* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2004). The following passage explains recurrence in the Italian dialogues: 'Inoltre dichiara ancora una volta la piena consapevolezza del fatto che la civiltà rinascimentale, esaurita ed esaurata, ha toccato il fondo della notte, un tempo estremo dopo il quale si può finalmente guardare in avanti: "ora che siamo stati nella feccia delle opinioni, le quali son causa della feccia de gli costumi ed opre, possiamo certo aspettare de ritornare a miglior stati"' (p. 10). Bruno introduces what Sabbatino calls 'mutazione epocale' i.e. a passage to a new age 'il cui protagonista sarà proprio il furioso eroico' (p. 10).

l'antico riabilitato e rafforzato dalle conoscenze del presente'.<sup>71</sup> Humanity was on the cusp of a new period of light which would witness the widespread adoption of Egyptian and pre-Socratic theories rather than remain under the shadow of Aristotelianism.

Second, as well as the idea of recurring historical cycles, eternity possesses a significant position in Bruno's decidedly untraditional infinite cosmos. The last two chapters presented time as vicissitude in the Italian dialogues, focusing on the idea of perpetual change and the mutations of matter and form that constitute the passage of time. However, vicissitude endures endlessly, a form of infinite duration within an infinite universe. I have previously highlighted Bruno's image of the *ruota del tempo* turning endlessly, as well as his conviction that 'everything changes, nothing dies' - it appears that time itself endures infinitely, despite consisting of innumerable finite parts.

Finally, to complicate matters further, eternity also exists in a slightly more conventional sense through the World Soul or *anima del mondo*. As I highlighted above, this is a concept borrowed directly from Plato, which Bruno would have familiarised himself with through Ficino's commentaries, and it infuses the matter we have seen defined by change with eternal substance.<sup>72</sup> God is now within the cosmos itself, rather than surrounding it in a spatial and temporal eternity. Consequently, a set of complex layers of time emerges in the Italian dialogues through the idea that vicissitude endures infinitely, while matter also contains an eternal substance that connects it to everything else in the infinite universe.

It is also important to note here that a distinct layer of complexity emerges when one considers whether Bruno's divinity is immanent or transcendent - across the entirety of Bruno's works one finds quotations that appear to support both conceptions of God.<sup>73</sup> This apparent duality may well be explained by the sources Bruno draws on; in this matter he was greatly influenced by the German philosopher and theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), who was modifying ideas taken from Plotinus.<sup>74</sup> Cusa attempted to adapt Neoplatonic philosophy on the nature of God to Christianity by introducing a theory of *massimo assoluto* and *massimo contratto* in the first two books of *De docta*

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<sup>71</sup> Nuccio Ordine, 'Introduzione', in Giordano Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, 2 vols, ed. by Nuccio Ordine (Turin, UTET 2002), p. 76.

<sup>72</sup> See Spruit, p. 189. 'Le fonti più dirette di Bruno nel secondo dialogo sono il *Timaeus* di Platone, Plotino e Ficino'.

<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, the same problem also arises in the work of Louis Le Roy. See Philippe de Lajarte, 'Entre logique naturelle et logique providentielle: les ressorts de l'histoire d'après le traité "De la vicissitude ou variété des choses en l'univers" de Loys Le Roy', *Seizième Siècle*, 10 (2014), pp. 245-260 (p. 255).

<sup>74</sup> The Greek philosopher's theories on the nature of divinity straddle an uneasy line between immanence and transcendence. See Arthur H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus: an Analytical and Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 42-44.

*ignorantia* (1440).<sup>75</sup> The *massimo assoluto* refers to God while the *massimo contratto* describes the Earth, which operates through mechanisms that imitate (in an imperfect manner) the mechanisms of God himself. Cusa sought to transform this rather pantheistic-sounding conception of divinity into a more transcendent theory by firmly emphasising the distinction between God and his creation, but the Church accused him of pantheism despite his best efforts to avoid such a charge. These intricacies reappear in Bruno's work; Hélène Védérine has already noted the confusion that arises from attempting to classify God as pantheistic or immanent in Bruno's thought.<sup>76</sup> As we will see below, the *Eroici Furori* firmly describe an all-encompassing God which infuses the infinite universe, while the *De umbris idearum* and other Latin texts put forth the opposite viewpoint.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, this thesis is unable to resolve this complex issue once and for all; rather the focus on the *Eroici Furori* in this discussion will naturally draw on Bruno's immanentist vocabulary with emphasis on the transcendent nature of eternity where appropriate.

Unsurprisingly, the small number of scholars that have already studied Bruno and time admit - either directly or indirectly - that Bruno's conception of eternity adds a distinct layer of complexity to his understanding of time. Furthermore, Gatti has previously emphasised its distinct originality; in particular, the nature of soul 'becomes one of the most complex and original aspects of his atomistic philosophy'.<sup>78</sup> I will examine these layers in more detail and particularly how they relate to Bruno's cosmology. Thus far, Bruno has demonstrated a tendency to attack standard 16th-century conceptions of time, due in part to his radical cosmological theories. However, like Montaigne, traditional notions of eternity occupy an unusual position in the Italian dialogues. Bruno is highly influenced by the more conventional Neoplatonic theories of Ficino and others, but he simultaneously integrates these ideas into a heretical cosmology.

In this section, I examine a range of texts from the Italian dialogues, including *De la causa, principio e uno* (1584) and *De l'infinito, universo e mondi* (1584). Both dialogues contain several passages which describe time, eternity and the function of the World Soul

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<sup>75</sup> Elisabetta Scapparone, 'Un seminario su "fonti e motivi dell'opera di Giordano Bruno"', *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 48.2 (1993), pp. 395-400 (p.398). On the connection between Bruno and Nicholas of Cusa see Leo Catana, 'The Coincidence of Opposites: Cusanian and Non-Cusanian Interpretations in the Thought of Bruno', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 17.2 (2011), pp. 381-400.

<sup>76</sup> Hélène Védérine, *La conception de la nature chez Giordano Bruno* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), pp. 324-325. 'Tous les lecteurs de Bruno savent qu'on trouve chez lui, en quantités à peu près égales, des textes favorables à la transcendance divine et d'autres qui suggèrent un immanentisme total' (p. 324).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>78</sup> Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, p. 74.

in Bruno's cosmology; reference to Bruno's later text *Camoeracensis Acrotismus* (1588) will also be useful in this respect. From *De la causa* onwards, Bruno's desire to reconnect human beings with nature through a true understanding of its workings is displayed through his emphasis on 'questa ricerca dell'Uno, [in] questa contemplazione della natura'.<sup>79</sup> The World Soul is an integral part of space and time in the infinite universe since it vivifies everything and brings about the joining of matter and form in nature. It is also eternal and contains the souls of everything else within it so that the infinite universe becomes a simulacrum of God, an image of divine unity.<sup>80</sup> The repercussions of time, infinite duration and the World Soul for Bruno's understanding of the best way to live in the world will become clear in the final section of this chapter. Here I hope to show that Bruno (like Montaigne) adopts an array of traditional references to 16th-century eternity alongside his decidedly untraditional objective of delineating a true conception of the infinite universe.

In a typical passage from *De l'infinito* Bruno criticises Scholastic definitions of eternity. According to Bruno the eternity of the *Physics* and 'alcuni teologi' is severely problematic: 'Da questa dottrina dico avete modo di estricarvi da innumerabili labirinti' (*De l'infinito* II.80). Instead, Bruno once more sets forth an alternative definition of eternity that is itself constituted of several different moving parts. One of the clearest explanations of time and eternity in Bruno's philosophy appears in the *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, Bruno's thorough dismantling of Aristotle's *Physics*. Although the Latin text was written a few years after the *Eroici Furori*, it discusses time and eternity in a concise and technical manner that aligns with longer passages from both *De l'infinito* and *De la causa*. In Article XXXIX of *Camoeracensis*, Bruno begins by explaining his cosmology in spatial terms. His monistic universe is a vast and infinite space; 'one single place, one single infinity, one infinite space'.<sup>81</sup> However, these characteristics also apply to Bruno's understanding of time in this universe: 'one single time, one single duration, that possesses neither end nor beginning'.<sup>82</sup> As Granada has stated, while there is often a focus on spatial infinitude in Bruno's works, 'the universe is infinite along the temporal plane

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<sup>79</sup> Ordine, p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>81</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Acrotismus camoeracensis*, ed. by F. Fiorentino (Naples: Dom. Morano, 1879), p. 146. Translation own. Original text: 'locus unus, infinitum unum, infinitum spatium commune'. For an excellent foreword and historical background to this text, see the Italian translation edited by Barbara Amato in Giordano Bruno, *Acrotismo cameracense. Le spiegazioni degli articoli di fisica contro i Peripatetici*, trans. and ed. by Barbara Amato, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 7 (Pisa: Serra, 2009), p. 11-34.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Original text: 'ita unum tempus commune, una duratione, nec finem neque principium ullum recognoscens'.

too: it is eternal and its eternity is established with the same theological necessity as the spacial infinitude'.<sup>83</sup> In fact, both time and eternity exist under one single duration.<sup>84</sup> While eternity is a single duration that possesses neither beginning nor end, time is the duration of individual, finite being. Some things - such as the World Soul - endure eternally and have neither beginning nor end, while others endure temporally, 'and of these temporal things, some endure for longer while others endure for shorter periods of time'.<sup>85</sup> Time is a form of duration, still firmly anchored to mutation: 'time is always the measure of some kind of revolution'.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, eternity is infinite duration and in *De l'infinito* Filoteo refers to eternity as 'tempo infinito' (*De l'infinito* II.80). To summarise, time is a species of duration, and there is both finite and infinite duration (time and eternity, respectively).

Nonetheless, the relationship between time and eternity is arguably more complicated than a distinction between two different types of duration. As stated above, alongside the 'unica durata' of eternity is the duration of temporally finite parts i.e., those things or beings which endure for different lengths of time. This latter definition constitutes the conception of time outlined in Chapters One and Two - a process of constant mutation. In the *Cena* finite beings exist 'in diversi tempi': '...se non in un medesimo tempo ed instante d'eternità, al meno in diversi tempi, in varii instanti d'eternità successiva e vicissitudinalmente...' (*Cena* I.556). Furthermore, Bruno consistently describes time in terms of atoms, which recalls the Heraclitean flux that also permeates time in the *Essais* (although Bruno uses clear philosophical terminology): 'influiscano nuovi atomi e da noi se dipartano li già altre volte accolti' (*De l'infinito* II.72).<sup>87</sup> All bodies are composed of atoms, and these atoms endure infinitely, so that the matter and form of beings mutate in an endless process. In the *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* Bruno states several times that *sustanza corporea* itself is *eterna*: 'è vera sustanza de la cose, eterna

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<sup>83</sup> M.A. Granada, 'El concepto de tiempo en Bruno: tiempos cósmicos y eternidad', in *La filosofia di Giordano Bruno: Problemi ermeneutici e storiografici*, ed. by Eugenio Canone (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2003), pp. 85-113 (pp. 86-87). Translation own. While I have previously stated that Granada believes there is little of importance with regards to time in the Italian dialogues, in his valuable study of eternity in Bruno's works he draws on passages from *De l'infinito* (as well as the first book of *De immenso*).

<sup>84</sup> Bruno, *Acrotismus camoeracensis*, p. 147.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Original text: 'ita sub communi una omnium duratione, diversis diversae duratione atque tempora appropriantur'. See Hutton, pp. 357-358. See also Nicola Badaloni, 'Sulla struttura del tempo in Giordano Bruno', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 3.1 (1997), pp. 11-45. Badaloni accepts that time is a measure of motor but he says this cannot apply to the sky and that there is a time on Earth 'e tanti tempi quanti sono gli astri' (p. 35).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. Original text: 'Immo semper tempus alicuius revolutionis quantitas est'.

<sup>87</sup> Of course, Bruno will go on to expound atomism in much more detail in his later Latin works, particularly in his epic poem *De immenso*.



ingenerabile, incorrottibile' (*Spaccio* II.181). This eternal substance ensures that *mutazione* itself endures infinitely while being simultaneously composed of parts that endure temporally: 'E così oltre et oltre sempre scorrendo per il fato della mutazione, eterno verrà incorrendo altre et altre peggiori e migliori specie di vita e di fortuna' (*Spaccio* II. 184); 'perciocché questa [vita], senza sperar giamai ritorno, eternamente passa' (*Spaccio* II. 310). Matter and form endures temporally while the atoms that constitute matter endure infinitely, signifying that the process of vicissitude itself is eternal.

If eternity (infinite duration) complicates the question of time in the Italian dialogues, Bruno at least remains consistent in his depiction of its relationship to time (finite duration). Even in the *Candelaio*, the character Bartolomeo reflects on the value of money and portrays it as an element that embraces all others in much the same way as the World Soul: 'Questo dà la vita temporale e la eterna ancora' (*Candelaio* I.324). Life is timely and eternal at the same time - matter endures temporally but mutates eternally.<sup>88</sup> Mara Elena Severini identifies vicissitude as a process of temporal opposites while employing familiar Platonic terms of being and becoming: 'la vicissitudine è combinazione di essere e divenire, di identità e differenza, di variazione e continuità, gioco di alternanze, di andate e ritorni'.<sup>89</sup> In conclusion, in the Italian dialogues, the process of vicissitude endures eternally but its parts endure temporally, for different lengths of time. I have demonstrated that this belief remains constant throughout the entirety of his vernacular works and argue that he also manages to integrate common definitions of eternity into a decidedly unconventional cosmos.

The key to understanding this process lies with another element of eternity. Matter never perishes because it contains the World Soul.<sup>90</sup> This World Soul - known in Latin as the *anima mundi* and in Bruno's native Italian as *anima del mondo* - is the eternal substance that connects everything to everything else. In *De la causa* Bruno

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<sup>88</sup> Badaloni, p. 35. '[Il] tempo è per un lato un "semper" che è anche atomo, per l'altro è un trascorrere che, se da luogo a una continuità diviene durata'.

<sup>89</sup> Maria Elena Severini, 'Vicissitudine e tempo nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno', in *La mente di Giordano Bruno*, ed. by F. Meroi (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2004), pp. 225-258 (p. 228). Commenting on Fracastoro and the ontological components of the universe (unity and being), Severini claims that they are represented with a 'moto a spirale': '....esso è anche il simbolo sensibile del tempo: un tempo che è rettilineità e circolarità, progresso e ritorno; realtà intermedia, come intermedio è il moto spiraliforme, esso è combinazione di eternità e divenire, mobile ed immobile, sintesi del medesimo e del diverso, proprio come la vicissitudine è combinazione di essere e divenire, di identità e differenza, di variazione e continuità, gioco di alternanze, di andate e ritorni' (p. 228).

<sup>90</sup> Knox explains why this theory is so different to Aristotelianism: 'Though devoid of all qualities and hence imperceptible, matter was discernible by reason. Since, then, it was an object of thought, it existed. It was not, that is, the *prope nihil* of Aristotelian philosophy but instead, no less than the World Soul, a 'substance'. Both the World Soul and universal matter were eternal. Indeed they were the only eternal things of nature. All else, including individual souls, was accidental' (p. 474).

paraphrases various passages from Ficino's translation of Plotinus' *Enneads* in order to describe how exactly the eternal substance of the World Soul infuses everything else with soul: '...quella donando la vita e perfezione al corpo non riporta da esso imperfezione alcuna: e però eternamente è congiunta al medesimo soggetto' (*De la causa* I.657). The *anima del mondo* imbues and animates every atom in the universe with its divine substance: 'non è minimo corpusculo che non contegna cotal porzione in sé, che non inanimi' (*De la causa* I.661); '...lui ha tutta l'anima in sé, e tutto lo animato comprende, ed è tutto quello' (*De la causa* I.661); 'questo spirito empie il tutto' (*De la causa* I.668). There are countless other passages, not only in the *De la causa*, that consistently emphasise the all-encompassing nature of the World Soul. It infuses everything and therefore binds everything together, an immanent form of divinity which forms the basis of Bruno's pantheism. Furthermore, in *De l'infinito* Bruno explains that there are two different motors which cause movement: 'doi principii attivi di moto' (*De l'infinito* II.55). One is finite, 'e questo muove in tempo' (*De l'infinito* II.55). The other is infinite, divine and it is called the World Soul:

l'altro infinito, secondo la ragione dell'anima del mondo, overo della divinità, che è come anima de l'anima, la quale è tutta in tutto e fa esser l'anima tutta in tutto; e questo muove in istante. (*De l'infinito* II.55)

The World Soul is the soul of all souls, 'anima de l'anima', a divine, all-encompassing entity within which all other souls exist. Moreover, this World Soul does not exist in time; rather it exists in one eternal instant: 'muove in istante'. If everything is mobile, then the source of this movement is due to the emanation of the World Soul. Paul-Henri Michel has identified two different kinds of substance in his study of nature in Bruno's work - the World Soul is a substance with the power to shape while matter is the substance which is shaped by the *anima mundi*.<sup>91</sup> As I have argued, matter is reshaped and reformed along the various instants of time and not the one single instant of eternity, since only the World Soul is eternal and thus responsible for generating all movement of matter in the universe.<sup>92</sup> The *anima mundi* was an eternal, vivifying force that directly infused matter within a pantheistic conception of the universe.

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<sup>91</sup> Michel, p. 113.

<sup>92</sup> In Eugenio Canone, 'Bruno e la fine di tutte le cose. Sui motivi apocalittici dello "Spaccio"', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 2 (2004), pp. 269-282, Canone writes on substance and soul in *De la causa*: 'Egli considera sostanze semplici anche ciò che nel *De la causa*, principio et uno definisce come i due generi di sostanza: la sostanza spirituale e la sostanza corporea, quindi l'anima e l'atomo, che da tale angolazione si configurano come i due contrari fondamentali. Questi due generi rinviano alla divinità in quanto essa si comunica nella natura e non alla divinità concepita *sub specie aeternitatis*, cioè assoluta e immutabile' (p. 273). See also Knox, p. 474.

Furthermore, Bruno is wary of how difficult it is to try and contemplate or even articulate such a conception of eternity. Without embracing radical scepticism to the same degree as Montaigne, Bruno also acknowledges that humans will never be able to ‘see’ eternal substance enduring infinitely: ‘non veggiamo perfettamente questo universo di cui la sustanza et il principale è tanto difficile ad essere compreso’ (*De la causa* I.649). It is certainly possible to surmise the finite duration of individual things: ‘le possiamo veder tutte, et esaminar parte per parte’ (*De la causa* I.649). However, one cannot actually experience the World Soul animating the entire universe: ‘ma non già il grande et infinito effetto della divina potenza: però quella similitudine deve essere intesa senza proporzional comparazione’ (*De la causa* I.649). In consequence, traditional means of counting the passage of time once again fail to express eternal oneness. In eternity ‘non differisce la ora dal giorno, il giorno da l’anno, l’anno dal secolo, il secolo dal momento’ (*De la causa* I.727). Trying to articulate a state in which conventional time markers become utterly and completely irrelevant, nonsensical even, is extremely difficult: ‘perché non son più gli momenti e le ore, che gli secoli; e non hanno minor proporzione quelli che questi a la eternità’ (*De la causa* I.727); ‘dunque infinite ore non sono più che infinite secoli...’ (*De la causa* I.727). All of these elements - finite duration, infinite duration, the World Soul - combine in a passage from *De l’infinito* that begins by denying our ability to measure eternity:

...ne l’infinita durazione, che è l’eternità, non sono più le ore che gli secoli; di sorte che ogni cosa che si dice parte de l’infinito, in quanto che è parte de l’infinito, è infinita cossì nell’infinita durazione come ne l’infinita mole. (*De l’infinito* II.80)

However, even though time markers are inapplicable to eternity, the two concepts of time and eternity are united under the umbrella term of ‘duration’ and are physically incorporated into a temporally and spatially infinite universe. As Severini has commented: ‘Nel pensiero bruniano, infatti, l’unità a tutti i livelli è intessuta di differenze spazio-temporali; ed è proprio da questo scarto e da questa possibilità di variazione che deriva ogni possibile libertà’.<sup>93</sup> I have demonstrated that Montaigne shares many similarities with Bruno when we consider their depiction of vicissitude. However, their views on eternity are different. As we will see in the final section of this chapter, Bruno’s clear and consistent integration of the immanent World Soul into his cosmology ironically suggests the faint possibility of transcendence that Montaigne paid little attention to in his characterisation of eternity. Despite the impermanence of time, the

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<sup>93</sup> Severini, ‘Vicissitudine e tempo’, p. 230.

eternal presence of the World Soul within Bruno's conception of time provides a clear if arduous path towards divine, eternal knowledge.

Bruno's conception of the eternal was also influenced by a range of traditional sources which he proceeded to manipulate in untraditional ways. While we have seen that many of Bruno's theories relating to his cosmology were highly controversial, the World Soul was a fairly common idea in the late 1500s. From the 12th century onwards Calcidius, Macrobius and other commentators ensured that Virgil and Plato's works were widely disseminated, while Bruno himself received these ideas through Ficino's influential commentaries.<sup>94</sup> The World Soul was easily compatible with the Holy Spirit of Christianity; as Tullio Gregory explains, 'nel cristianesimo dei primi secoli...è spesso ricordata come anticipazione profetica dell'opera ordinatrice di Dio o prefigurazione dello Spirito Santo'.<sup>95</sup> This connection continued well into the later Middle Ages with the return of Platonism in the 12th century.<sup>96</sup> Christian thinkers had clearly adopted the idea of the World Soul as a force responsible for life and movement for centuries, and thinkers from Bruno's age - such as Patrizi - were merely continuing this tradition by assimilating the World Soul into their own philosophies.

However, Bruno incorporates this concept into an infinite universe. As Gregory states, 'l'anima del mondo garantisce la vita e l'ordine del cosmo (*divinum animal*)'.<sup>97</sup> The *cosmo* in question arguably becomes a universe in the Italian dialogues; the eternal World Soul lies within a temporally and spatially infinite universe, responsible for setting all matter into motion.<sup>98</sup> Consequently eternity is not the supra-temporal eternity of God's time, placed firmly at the edges of the closed universe, and the World Soul/Holy Spirit does not emanate from his being. Rather Bruno's entire universe is 'uno, infinito, immobile' (*De la causa* I.725) and it endures endlessly, 'questo uno è eterno...' (*De la causa*

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<sup>94</sup> See Spruit, p. 193. In Tullio Gregory, 'Anima del Mondo', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 12.2 (2006), pp. 525-535, Gregory provides a useful summary of the World Soul in Ficino's commentaries and particularly the *Theologia platonica*: 'Nel sistema della Theologia platonica l'anima razionale occupa una posizione centrale lungo la catena degli esseri: inferiore a Dio e agli angeli, superiore al mondo della materia e delle qualità "tam superiores quam inferiores connectit in unum". Ma questa anima si articola in più anime: "mundani huius animalis membra per unam animam vinciuntur", "ab anima superiorum virtute fit motus oepris ordinati". Al di sotto dell'anima del mondo stanno altre anime razionali: le anime delle dodici sfere (otto celesti e quattro elementari), poi le anime di singoli abitanti le varie sfere (anime delle stelle, dei demoni, degli eroi, degli uomini)' (p. 530). Gregory explains that Ficino saw in the World Soul the complete convergence of Ancient philosophy and Christian theology. Patrizi aligns the World Soul with Hermeticism, Zoroastrianism, ancient magics, Orpheus and Pythagoras - all except Leucippus and Epicurus.

<sup>95</sup> Gregory, p. 526.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 528. '[...] nello sviluppo del platonismo del secolo XII si farà sempre più netta l'identificazione dell'anima mundi con una forza cosmica principio di vita e di moto' (p. 528).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>98</sup> See also Bruno (*De la causa* I.657-658).

I.730). God is within the universe itself, a monistic view of nature which lies in stark opposition to a world in the centre, enveloped by the stars and surrounded by God. There is no Afterlife, there is no Heaven and Hell, because this universe is already everything that is: ‘e cossì tutto concorre in una perfetta unità’ (*De la causa* I.730). In the *Furori* the ‘uno’ of eternity acquires a Platonic sense, eternity is ‘l’istante de l’eternità’ whereas time is made up of ‘gl’istanti del tempo’ (*Furori* II.307). Platonists believed that eternity consisted of one whole instant, an instant in which temporal divisions did not exist. Furthermore, in *De l’infinito* Filoteo responds to Elpino’s doubts concerning the difference between an Earth at the centre of a finite cosmos and a universe by assuring him that many classical sects of philosophy have already proposed this: ‘...è molto divulgata fuor della scola peripatetica’ (*De l’infinito* II.60). Here Bruno may well be referring to the Pre-Socratics such as Parmenides who considered God to be one, infinite and immobile, situated within nature itself.<sup>99</sup> He also appears to draw on the Greek biographer Diogenes Laertius to identify the position of the Stoics and Epicureans in this respect; the Stoics, for example, ‘dicono il mondo essere finito, ma l’universo infinito’ (*De l’infinito* II.60).<sup>100</sup> In any case, Bruno is keen to undermine Aristotelian philosophy in favour of an allegiance to those Greek schools whose theories stood in opposition to Aristotle.

In conclusion, eternity possesses a highly complex relationship to time and the cosmos. As with Bruno’s conception of time, eternity is also intimately linked to his theories on substance, matter, and form. Eternity - like time - is a form of duration, and yet the parts of time that mutate and change do so for eternity. Furthermore, the ‘forza coesiva dell’anima del mondo’ plays an integral role in Bruno’s understanding of the composition of nature. Following Plotinus’ conception of *anima mundi* all souls and bodies reside in the ‘anima delle anime’. In comparison to Montaigne’s *Essais*, the relationship between time and eternity is highly complicated, since there is arguably more than one type of eternity or eternal ‘thing’ to take account of. In addition to Bruno’s use of metempsychosis in the *Cabala* and his well-documented belief in a kind of epistemological eternal recurrence, eternity is incorporated into Bruno’s cosmology in several layers. The extent to which these beliefs were acceptable in the 1500s is equally complex. Some aspects of eternity, such as the World Soul, resound with those of his

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<sup>99</sup> Spruit, p. 65. Spruit remarks that Bruno did not actually possess a complete and thorough knowledge of the pre-Socratics, and in his works he occasionally gets their names wrong e.g. confusion between Parmenides and Melissus.

<sup>100</sup> As well as Diogenes Laertius, Jean Seidengart suggests in the footnotes to this particular passage that another potential source may be the Greek doxographer Aetius and his *De Placita Philosophorum* (p. 60).

contemporaries such as Patrizi.<sup>101</sup> However, Bruno integrates such conceptions of eternity into a cosmology that is decidedly untraditional. Humans are physically bound to each other and all things in nature through a divine, eternal substance which runs counter to the hierarchical Book of Nature that had been popular for centuries and continued to be promoted by thinkers such as Raymond Sebond (1385-1436). Eternity complicates time and yet, as we will see, it has fascinating repercussions for Bruno's beliefs concerning the best way to use time.

## Eternity, Time, Truth

So far this thesis has focused on explaining how Montaigne and Bruno define time. I hope to have demonstrated that they are both excellent examples of two thinkers who, despite their differences, were opening out new and exciting ideas of temporality in the 1500s.<sup>102</sup> This willingness to go beyond Christian-Scholastic conceptions of time now continues with the introduction of a new line of thought: how do the definitions of time presented so far affect certain aspects of Montaigne's and Bruno's philosophy? In particular, I wish to explore in the latter half of this chapter how both thinkers perceive the best way to make use of time, defined as it is by mortality, passage, and flux. Neither thinker is content to discuss temporality in purely abstract terms; both Montaigne and Bruno also consider time in a practical sense and possess their own opinions concerning the best way to utilise the time at one's disposal.<sup>103</sup> Much of this thesis has centred around death, but Montaigne and Bruno were also preoccupied with how one might live.

Indeed, it appears that the best response to a future constantly defined by human mortality is knowledge seeking. But what particular knowledge do both thinkers seek? And how does this connect with their understanding of time? In the *Essais* one of Montaigne's ultimate desires is to write about himself, to know himself, while Bruno

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<sup>101</sup> Bruno would not have been pleased with this comparison - he referred to Patrizi as 'sterco di pedanti' despite the similarities in their thought. For Patrizi's place within late Renaissance cosmology (with a comparison to Bruno) see Gianni Paganini, 'Les enjeux de la cosmobiologie à la fin de la Renaissance: Juste Lipse et Giordano Bruno', *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 201.2 (2011), pp. 165-185. See also Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964), pp. 181-184.

<sup>102</sup> As Waller has suggested: 'from the works of an increasing minority of late sixteenth century writers, it can, however, be seen that time was becoming discussed in terms of ideas other than the received religious ones' (p. 7).

<sup>103</sup> This issue brings to mind the ancient philosophical debate concerning the active versus the contemplative life, which was still being discussed in the Renaissance. Thinkers such as Ficino advocated the marriage of contemplation and action, a notion derived from Plato. For an excellent introduction to this debate and its place in the Renaissance, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Active and the Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism' in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. 4 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996), pp. 197-214.

devotes his writing to revealing the truth of nature. Making good use of time means trying to fulfil these objectives as best they can despite the impermanence of time.

In 'Du repentir' (III.II) temporal flux poses serious consequences for one of Montaigne's key purposes in writing - it is set within the context of the trouble he has in recording himself. The author states that 'Je ne puis assurer mon object. Il va troublant et chancelant, d'une yvresse naturelle' (III.II.805). Then he asserts one of his most famous dictums: 'Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage: non un passage d'aage en autre, ou, comme dict le peuple, de sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute' (III.II.805). Montaigne cannot write the 'estre' because it is constantly in flux, he can only record the 'passage' of himself as it changes from day to day, even minute to minute. Thus the author of the *Essais* reflects the nature of time in his shifting and changing writing style. Montaigne is determined to try and find truth in an uncertain world; as Ian Maclean has stated, humans may well exist in temporal flux, but we still possess rational and sensory tools which enable us to live in the world.<sup>104</sup> Finding truth requires a focus on knowing oneself - in other words, accessing the truth of experience, since the one thing that humans can reliably know about is themselves.

What kind of truth is Bruno looking for? We have seen that the divine, eternal World Soul is within everything and everyone; for Bruno God is thus 'not above the universe, but intimately within it, the matrix that holds all the incessantly active atoms that combine and recombine to create different forms of matter'.<sup>105</sup> To try and find divine truth is to look inwardly at oneself and access the divine spirit coursing through our bodies as the whole world mutates endlessly. Although Bruno's literary form favours an approach with multiple interlocutors, the *Eroici Furori* (which have previously been described as the culmination of his project in the Italian dialogues) present a final aim which seeks to access the divine spirit coursing through each human being.

Quinones has argued that Renaissance thinkers attempted 'to achieve by means of process what eternity possesses in stasis'.<sup>106</sup> In other words, early modern thinkers used the time at their disposal to try and access the truth of eternity, which is a property of the divine.<sup>107</sup> However, Quinones concludes that 'as long as man is involved in time this is

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<sup>104</sup> Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, p. 157.

<sup>105</sup> Ingrid D. Rowland in Giordano Bruno, *On the Heroic Frenzies*, ed. by Ingrid D. Rowland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. xxxi.

<sup>106</sup> Quinones, *Discovery of Time*, p. 26.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

impossible'.<sup>108</sup> I wish to argue that Montaigne and Bruno are intimately aware of their natural limitations in time and yet still challenge time regardless, pushing the boundaries of these limitations to an extreme that we have seen with suicide, recounting one's own 'death', denying death itself and refusing to approach time solely through the narrow lens of religion. Bruno is undoubtedly eager to access divine truth, and while it may be impossible he sets out how to use time to further this objective regardless. Montaigne does not even appear to hold this lofty aim; instead, his use of time is shaped by a desire to try and record truth about himself despite his constantly changing being. Both thinkers recognise the obstacles that time raises with regards to knowledge-seeking and continue in their pursuits anyway - pursuits which may one day reveal some form of higher truth.

### *Montaigne*

In the aptly-named chapter 'De l'inconstance de nos actions' (II.I), Montaigne emphasises the various contradictions and incoherencies of human beings. As stated above, 'branle' is a term often used to describe time in the *Essais* and in this chapter, Montaigne couches his discussion of human emotions and opinions in temporal terms. He describes how each day brings new feelings and flights of imagination; 'nos humeurs' move in line with 'les mouvemens du temps' (II.I.333) and consequently 'nous flottons entre divers advis' (II.I.333). The inconstancy of time is not just reflected in external reality, i.e. the changing seasons and the tides; rather it affects the inner essence of our being.

In the *Essais* temporal inconstancy lies at the root of our existence. 'Nostre façon ordinaire, c'est d'aller apres les inclinations de nostre apetit, à gauche, à dextre, contre-mont, contre-bas, selon que le vent des occasions nous emporte' (II.I.333). At each instant in time humans allow themselves to drift along 'le vent des occasions' and our appetites and inclinations reflect this (like *branle*, *vent* is another term Montaigne regularly employs to describe time). One might state an opinion and then change it an hour later, only to return to it again at another moment in time, 'ce n'est que branle et inconstance' (II.I.333). Our changing appetites and desires remain throughout our entire existence: 'Nous recommençons tousjours à vivre. Nous avons le pied à la fosse, et nos appetits et poursuites ne font que naistre' (II.XXVIII.702). Here Montaigne suggests that human beings are subject to change, not only due to external factors but also their own actions and behaviour: 'Non seulement le vent des accidens me remue selon son inclination, mais

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



en outre je me remue et trouble moy mesme par l'instabilité de ma posture' (II.I.335). Montaigne highlights how little control he has over 'le vent des accidens' - instead it shapes him and changes him 'selon son inclination'. Further inconstancy exists due to his attempts to pin down a portrait of his impermanence (since 'nous sommes partout vent' (I.XIII.1107)): 'Je donne à mon ame tantost un visage, tantost un autre, selon le costé où je la couche. Si je parle diversement de moy, c'est que je me regarde diversement' (II.I.335). Indeed, the *Essais* are written amidst this changing and inconstant depiction of each human being in time. How then does one begin to navigate such a world if everything is in flux?

Montaigne is keen to establish practical virtues in response to this question and Socrates' example greatly influences him in this regard.<sup>109</sup> Many Renaissance humanists (most notably Marsilio Ficino and Erasmus) marvelled at Socrates' dedication to civic virtues, and Montaigne is no different. In 'De la Phisionomie' he describes the Greek philosopher in glowing terms as 'le plus digne homme d'estre cogneu et d'estre présenté au monde pour exemple' (III.XII.1038). This quality is exactly what Montaigne searches for in the figure of Socrates - an example of how to live well in the world. Philosophy must teach people how to *use* time wisely, to the same degree that it must teach people how to think: 'Quel dommage, si elles ne nous aprenent ny à bien penser, ny à bien faire?' (I.XXV.141). G.F. Waller has claimed that 'for Montaigne [...] the use of time is to exploit it, to spend it in the world'.<sup>110</sup> In 'Que philosopher' Montaigne claims that 'nous sommes nés pour agir. [...] Je veux qu'on agisse, et qu'on allonge les offices de la vie tant qu'on peut' (I.XX.89). One should extend 'les offices de la vie' as far as humanly possible through philosophical endeavour, even dying in the midst of doing so in the manner of Socrates; as Ovid (paraphrased by Montaigne) states: 'cum moriar, medium soluar et inter opus' (I.XX.89).<sup>111</sup> Finally, a quotation from 'De la solitude' (I.XXXIX) summarises Montaigne's interest in the learning he acquires from books: 'Je n'ayme, pour moy, que des livres ou plaisans et faciles, qui me chatouillent, ou ceux qui me consolent et *conseillent à régler ma vie et ma mort*' (I.XXXIX.246).<sup>112</sup> Philosophy not only teaches one how to die, it also teaches one how to live.

<sup>109</sup> See Elaine Limbrick, 'Montaigne and Socrates', *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 9.2 (1973), pp. 46-57. 'Socrates taught Montaigne that man's first duty was to learn how to live and then how to act.' (p. 55). See also p. 51 for a discussion of Socrates and the importance of 'ars vivendi' in the *Essais*.

<sup>110</sup> Waller, 'Renaissance Ideas of Time', p. 9.

<sup>111</sup> See Chapter Two, 'Montaigne, suicide and near-death experience' for more on the importance of Socrates' death in the *Essais*.

<sup>112</sup> Emphasis own.

Learning, philosophising, attempting to find truth - this is often portrayed as the most distinguished and honourable way to spend one's time: 'Car nous sommes nés à quester la vérité; il appartient de la posséder à une plus grande puissance...le monde n'est qu'une escole d'inquisition' (III.VIII.928). Here Montaigne approaches the search for truth in distinct terms - 'quester', 'posséder', 'escole d'inquisition'. Such vocabulary describes a need to search something out and suggests that humans possess a strong desire to fulfil curiosity; the world is a resource and it requires an individual to actively enquire about its workings in order to possess its truths. The verb 'quester' alludes to an open-ended search for knowledge, particularly since Montaigne states that the actual acquisition of truth belongs only to 'une plus grande puissance'. Instead, the human quest for truth is arguably reflected in the fate of the *Essais* themselves - they were edited and re-edited countless times before spurning a long and fruitful tradition of scholarship. Harking back to the sentiment of the 'Apologie' - when Montaigne stripped human beings down to their senses - at the start of 'De l'expérience' he reveals a similar desire to find truth using the haphazard tools of human beings: 'la vérité est chose si grande, que nous ne devons desdaigner aucune entremise qui nous y conduise' (III.XIII.1065). However, in light of Montaigne's depiction of time, the essayist clearly understands that the practical activity of learning and accessing truth in a temporal world is challenging.

The purpose of philosophy is to try and find 'un certain et assuré train' but only a few great philosophers have achieved this feat.<sup>113</sup> In 'De l'inconstance' Montaigne believes that in the whole of Greek and Roman antiquity, it is difficult to select even a dozen men who managed to adhere to a constant mode of living: 'En toute l'ancienneté, il est malaisé de choisir une douzaine d'hommes qui ayent dressé leur vie à un certain et assuré train, qui est le principal but de la sagesse' (I.II.332). Instead, according to the 'Apologie' human beings are dealt a lifetime of inconstancy:

Nous avons pour nostre part l'inconstance, l'irresolution, l'incertitude, le deuil, la superstition, la sollicitude des choses à venir, voire, apres nostre vie, l'ambition, l'avarice, la jalousie, l'envie, les appetits desreglez, forcenez et indomptables, la guerre, la mensonge, la desloyauté, la detraction et la curiosité. (II.XII.486)

In the passage above Montaigne presents a long list of encumbrances that the winds of time bring with it - death, uncertainty, changing tastes and emotions, the knowledge or concern of things to come 'voire, apres nostre vie'. Furthermore, in 'Que philosopher', before Montaigne discusses the tiny day flies of the Hypanis river, he

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<sup>113</sup> For Montaigne's portrayal of the Greeks and their devotion to acting on their philosophy, see Marcel Conche, 'Temps, temporalité, temporalisation', *L'enseignement philosophique*, 6 (2009), pp. 9-20.

remarks on the body and the soul, and the troubles one must contend with both inwardly and outwardly as part of living in a state of temporal flux: e.g. ‘passions et concupiscences’, ‘injures de fortune’. He states the following:

Le corps, courbé et plié, a moins de force à soustenir un fais; aussi a nostre ame: il la faut dresser et eslever contre l’effort de cet adversaire. Car, comme il est impossible qu’elle se mette en repos, pendant qu’elle le craint: si elle s’en assure aussi, elle se peut venter, qui est chose comme surpassant l’humaine condition, qu’il est impossible que l’inquietude, le tourment, la peur, non le moindre desplaisir loge en elle. (I.XX.91)

One must learn to live with change, and at least to form one’s soul if one cannot readily form one’s body too - this would be a state ‘surpassant l’humaine condition’, to tame ‘la maladie naturelle de leur esprit: il ne faict que fureter et quester, et va sans cesse tournoiant, bastissant et s’empestrant en sa besongne’ (III.XIII.1068). The ability to rise above the passage of time - despite its vicissitudes - is the sign of an ability to surpass the human condition itself. However, this appears to be a fruitless objective, one that is reflected in the human need to try and establish real and absolute truth about the world - Montaigne employs the verb ‘quester’ again to illustrate the restless and exploratory nature of this process.

The passage below contains a lengthy poetic quotation by Étienne De La Boétie, whose famously close friendship with Montaigne supposedly led to the creation of the *Essais* themselves.<sup>114</sup> Bearing in mind the description of time that we have encountered in Montaigne’s work so far, at first glance the passage may well be misinterpreted as a representation of time itself:

C’est un mouvement irregulier, perpetuel, sans patron, et sans but. Ses inventions s’eschauffent, se suyvent, et s’entreproduisent l’une l’autre. Ainsi voit l’on, en un ruisseau coulant,/Sans fin l’une? eau apres l’autre roulant,/Et tout de rang, d’un eternal conduit,/L’une suit l’autre, et l’une l’autre fuyt./Par cette-cy celle-là est poussée,/Et cette-cy par l’autre est devancée:/Tousjours l’eau va dans l’eau, et tousjours est-ce/Mesme ruisseau, et tousjours eau diverse. (III.XIII.1068-1069)

In an image that is strongly reminiscent of Bruno’s ‘ruota del tempo’, the ‘ruisseau coulant’ appears to represent the inconstancy of time, flowing endlessly like a stream of water, while reference to a ‘mouvement irregulier’ echoes the term *branle* which Montaigne frequently employed to describe the nature of time. However, the verse actually describes the flow of knowledge, and the consequences for both thought and

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<sup>114</sup> Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 117. See ‘Chapter Three - La Boétie and Montaigne: Discourse on Servitude and Essay of Allegiance’ for an excellent account of their friendship and the effect of La Boétie’s death on Montaigne.

time are twofold in this instance. According to this paragraph, knowledge is always changing. That which human beings believe to be true at one moment in time is always going to be replaced by something that contradicts it: ‘tousjours l’eau va dans l’eau...et tousjours eau diverse.’ In this way, the search for absolute truth reflects the nature of time, which is always changing - neither one can ever be truly grasped, and what is more, neither one appears to have a fixed end. Rather they both exist in this shifting and swarming manner ‘d’un eternal conduit’.

Montaigne’s decision to quote La Boétie also provides an excellent insight into the composition and style of the *Essais* in general. Upon his death, La Boétie bequeathed a copy of his now-famous *Discours de la servitude volontaire ou le Contr’un* to Montaigne, a text which was originally intended to appear at the heart of the *Essais*.<sup>115</sup> Instead, Montaigne’s three-volume work became a sprawling testament to the author’s thought in action, and the loss that Montaigne felt upon his friend’s death arguably led to the purposeful omission of the *Discours* from any significant place within the work. La Boétie’s missing text represents the symbiotic relationship between Montaigne and his writing - it symbolises Montaigne’s pain at the loss of his friend and the manner in which his own writing changed as a result of this pain.

In one final testament to the continual writing process, Montaigne even alters part of La Boétie’s original quotation. ‘Et cette-cy, par l’autre est devancée’ originally read ‘Et ceste cy, par un autre avancée’. As I have previously stated, Montaigne continually edited and re-edited his text, leading to the publication of several different versions of the *Essais*. The stylistic choice to amend La Boétie’s original phrase is just one smaller example of a wider process of revision, addition and deletion which arguably represents the nature of time itself. Indeed, it is little wonder that various scholars have linked Montaigne’s composition and style to his notion of ‘writing the self’ over time; the continual evolution of the *Essais* reflect Montaigne’s ever-changing thoughts and feelings, as well as his shifting tastes in philosophy and literature.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, Terence Cave describes the *Essais* as a moving self-portrait which has been engendered by time, while André Tournon states that the various editions and revisions Montaigne made to the text represent his desire to

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<sup>115</sup> Patrick Moser, ‘Montaigne’s Literary Patrons: The Case of La Boétie’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 31.2 (2000), pp. 381-397 (p. 381).

<sup>116</sup> Szabari claims that Montaigne’s project of self-representation can be found ‘at least’ from 1580 onwards until his death. See Antonia Szabari, ‘parler seulement de moi: The Disposition of the Subject in Montaigne’s Essay “De l’art de conferer”’, *Modern Language Notes*, 116.5 (2001), pp. 1001-1024 (p. 1005).

write time itself.<sup>117</sup> In Montaigne's own age, Louis Le Roy illustrated how the very nature of the human condition was reflected in humanity's irresistible desire to exchange ideas, letters, and texts. Like the river flowing this way and that, the words on the pages of the *Essais* became a living testament to the vicissitudinal nature of human beings.

If we continue to examine the idea that neither knowledge or time can ever truly be grasped, then in the final chapter of his three-volume work Montaigne discusses the *chasse de cognoissance* at length. He argues that the process is endless because opinions always generate more opinions, books have always generated more books. He refers to the long tradition of philosophical commentary as a 'fourmille de commentaires...'. Indeed, there are so many commentaries that getting to the root of the original problem is an arduous and lengthy process: 'Il y a plus affaire à interpreter les interpretations qu'à interpreter les choses...' (III.XIII.1069). As a result, for most human beings, the journey to true philosophical knowledge about the world never ends: 'Il y a tousjours place pour un suyvant, ouy et pour nous mesmes, et route par ailleurs. Il n'y a point de fin en nos inquisitions; nostre fin est en l'autre monde' (III.XIII.1068). Montaigne resolutely accepts the idea that knowledge seeking is an open-ended process and one that will inevitably come to an end with the final knowledge of death. He continues to express this idea of a self-perpetuating *chasse de cognoissance* thus: 'En semant les questions et les retaillant, on faict fructifier et foisonner le monde en incertitude et en querelles' (III.XIII.1067). He then reiterates these ideas for much of the following paragraph; the Heraclitean temporal flux that underlies the *Essais* bears witness to a similarly endless search for knowledge comparable to the infinite number of atoms in the universe: 'd'un subject nous en faisons mille, et retombons, en multipliant et subdivisant, à l'infinité des atomes d'Epicurus' (III.XIII.1067). Throughout all of these examples, Montaigne is discussing the particular problems concerning the knowledge to be acquired through the study of books, philosophies, histories. 'Ainsi vu que toutes choses sont sujettes à passer d'un changement en autre, la raison qui y cherche une réelle substance, se trouve déçue, ne pouvant rien appréhender de subsistant et permanent' (II.XII.601). The authority of books has always generated more opinions. The 'Apologie' was concerned with how human beings can ascertain the 'right' opinion, yet time is always changing, and throughout the passage of time knowledge only generates more and more knowledge of different kinds.

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<sup>117</sup> See Terence Cave, *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta, 2007), 'Chapter 7 - Documenting The Self'; also André Tournon, *Route par Ailleurs: le 'nouveau langage' des Essais* (Paris: Champion, 2006).

How is it possible for an individual to take hold of the passage of time and make something of it if everything - even opinions - are constantly mutating and changing and reaching out endlessly? The divine being is one, the same, eternal, whereas Man is 'cette créature indécise, instable et flottante'.<sup>118</sup> To remedy this temporal existence, bound to change at all times, Montaigne exhorts his readers to look inwardly to themselves:

En outre, c'est icy, chez nous, et non ailleurs, que doivent estre considérés les forces et les effects de l'ame; tout le reste de ses perfections luy est vain et inutile: c'est de l'estat present que doit estre payée et reconnue toute son immortalité, et de la vie de l'homme qu'elle est contable seulement. (II.XII.549)

'C'est de l'estat present que doit estre payée' - an individual should study and reflect upon oneself in each minute of the day; one must focus solely on the present and cast away thoughts of any other time so that the individual may accurately record him or herself as they exist from moment to moment. Again the influence of Socrates emerges; in this instance, Montaigne readily embraces the Socratic maxim to 'know thyself', a phrase which he will paraphrase directly elsewhere in the *Essais*.<sup>119</sup> Of course, due to the mutability of time that I have presented both here and in previous chapters, a distinct challenge arises. And yet, although the task ahead is a difficult one, what can anyone do except try? This approach to time is arguably the key to understanding why the *Essais* bear such a name. Montaigne's 'essais' or attempts to record himself from moment to moment are not definitive, but they are the most reliable record he has and the most accurate thing he can use to learn about the world. Cave summarises thus: 'The Essays were designed to record the flux and flow of his ever-changing existence within the totally contingent temporal world. If they were sometimes disjointed or contradictory, it was because human life itself was composed of discrete and inconsistent moments'.<sup>120</sup> I have demonstrated that Montaigne was expressing these ideas in a manner which opened out the definition of 16th century time to include vicissitude. The author of the *Essais* described this concept in much the same way as Bruno and even hoped to express the effects of this phenomenon through his writing.

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<sup>118</sup> Ahmeti, '2.2 L'inconstance humaine et le présent insaisissable'. Joukovsky also discusses the issue of 'nostre savoir...en perpétuelle modification, parce qu'il n'est pas connaissance de l'Etre' (p. 125). See Joukovsky, pp. 124-125.

<sup>119</sup> 'Ce grand precepte est souvent allegué en Platon: Fay ton faict et te cognoy' (I.III.15).

<sup>120</sup> Engster, p. 632.

Furthermore, Montaigne does not express an interest in time organisation or the desire to leave earthly life behind, as many of his contemporaries do.<sup>121</sup> In the Christian Middle Ages and early modern period most people were mindful of how their actions in the present would affect their life after death. Yet Montaigne advocates a focus on the immediate time at one's disposal.<sup>122</sup> After emphasising the diverse and changing opinions of human beings, Montaigne advocates a deep and studied introspection: 'L'advertissement à chacun de se cognoistre doit estre d'un important effect, puisque ce Dieu de science et de lumiere le fit planter au front de son temple, comme comprenant tout ce qu'il avoit à nous conseiller' (III.XIII.1075). Montaigne views the *Essais* as *essais* because he would never be able to fully master the act of recording himself: 'On peut continuer à tout temps l'estude, non pas l'escolage: la sotte chose qu'un vieillard abecedaire!' (II.XXVIII.703). He believed that human existence was so deeply penetrated by the vicissitude of time that he could only ever try (*essayer*) to record the flux of his thoughts and feelings.

Although this approach seems rather inward-looking, one must acknowledge at the end of this discussion that Montaigne was still very mindful of his social responsibility. So how does the process of 'knowing oneself' resound with the kind of civil practicality that Montaigne so admired in figures such as Socrates? Leading figures such as David Quint and Philippe Desan have already studied the extent of the essayist's participation in public life, and there is little need to contribute towards that lengthy debate in this thesis.<sup>123</sup> However, one should note that despite Montaigne's desire to try and express his being in time, it was also challenging for the thinker to extricate himself from the political and social upheaval occurring around his estate.

Quint states that Montaigne was fully aware of his political obligations to his home country.<sup>124</sup> As a nobleman with ties to the French court, the celebrated author of the *Essais* was never entirely free from public affairs, even if he wanted to be. For example, we have seen that a large part of his writing process in the *Essais* involved studying and paraphrasing the words of other thinkers. Quint has already demonstrated in *Montaigne*

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<sup>121</sup> See Quinones, *Discovery of Time*, p. 204. 'Montaigne transcends time not by prudentially looking to the future, but by disregarding the future and sinking into the present' (p. 241).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 205. 'Everything in the world was an effect of something beyond the world; everything in life was a step to something beyond life. [...] But Montaigne would have us focus on the thing at hand, in itself, and find our fulfilment in its own basic worth' (p. 205).

<sup>123</sup> See the recently published Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017) for a thorough account of Montaigne's role in active life; also David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>124</sup> Quint, *Quality of Mercy*, p. 105.

and the *Quality of Mercy* that many of Montaigne's examples, anecdotes and quotations are used by the author to reflect on his own times, particularly the Wars of Religion.<sup>125</sup> From gladiators to cannibals to religious martyrs, the thinker always had his own troubled age in mind as he wrote. More often than not, Montaigne's practical response to these dilemmas is a conservative approach which I will explore in further detail in Chapter Four, as the essayist responds to the practicalities of custom. While the *Essais* are arguably a study of a man's repeated attempts to pin down the essence of his being, Montaigne's writing was not quite so inward-looking as it might appear at first glance and it was often heavily coloured by his awareness of the political and social situation in France.

### *Bruno*

Time in the Italian dialogues is equally as impermanent and fluctuating as in the *Essais*. Time is countable and changeable while eternity is oneness, a duration without beginning or end. Bruno compares human time, 'questa frale et incerta vita' (*Cabala* II. 424) with eternal duration, 'quell'altra certissima et eterna' (*Cabala* II.424). However, in Bruno's philosophy eternity also resides inside human beings. Humans themselves have been infused with divine spirit, which presents a clear possibility for human beings to try and access divine truth. As a result, Bruno is similarly keen to explore how one may utilise time in order to reach this goal and frequently discusses philosophical objectives in a practical light. In the *Spaccio* Bruno merges action and contemplation so that one may not exist without the other: 'ha determinato la provvidenza che vegna occupato ne l'azione per le mani, e contemplazione per l'intelletto; de maniera che non contemple senza azzione, e non opre senza contemplazione' (II.324).<sup>126</sup> However it is in the *Eroici Furori*, a text which uses the dialogue form as a means of drawing closer to truth (rather than claiming absolute truth), that Bruno consistently explores a more practical philosophy, a way to live in the world which requires fervent study and a passionate devotion to knowledge seeking.

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<sup>125</sup> 'In all of the cases he cites, whether the victims are New World cannibals, citizens of defeated cities, indomitable gladiators, or religious martyrs, Montaigne is thinking about the antagonists of the Wars of Religion in France. [...] By the same token, Montaigne still has France in mind when he advocates the first course of submission, more common if less glamorous and heroic' (Ibid., p. 103).

<sup>126</sup> For the significance of the hand in Bruno's works see Nuccio Ordine, *La cabala dell'asino. Asinità e conoscenza in Giordano Bruno* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 45-50; Fulvio Papi, *Antropologia e civiltà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), pp. 237-247.



How does one use time efficiently in order to access divine truth? In the *Eroici Furori* Maricondo classifies the senses as our primary faculties, which are only capable of limited knowledge concerning ‘questo universo soggetto alli nostri occhi e comun raggione’ (*Furori* II.669).<sup>127</sup> What we see are merely ‘fatture simili a questo globo in cui siamo noi’ (*Furori* II.658). In order to look past what is merely visible and surpass this primary understanding of the world, one must attempt to look inwardly. It is not enough to worship God: ‘aprir gli occhi al cielo, alzar alto le mani, menar i passi al tempio’ (*Furori* II.658). Rather one must ‘venir al più intimo di sé, considerando che Dio è vicino, con sé e dentro di sé’ (*Furori* II.658). Bruno, borrowing from Seneca, emphasises the ultimate form of contemplation as a solitary one, an idea which resonates with Montaigne’s conclusion on the reliability of the self. ‘Ecco dunque come bisogna fare primeramente de ritrarsi dalla moltitudine in se stesso’ (*Furori* II.659); ‘se aspira al splendor alto, ritiresi quanto può all’unità, contrahasi quanto è possibile in se stesso’ (*Furori* II.657). Like Montaigne, Bruno is consistent in his enthusiasm for encouraging a more practical approach to accessing truth in the present moment - Sergius Koderer has already emphasised how Bruno views knowledge as something that must be grasped with the hands and held tightly, a sentiment which flies in the face of the Platonic contemplative gaze.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, Bruno often emphasises the need to withdraw into oneself in order to access divine truth effectively. Like Montaigne, this represents another form of introspection, but Bruno’s introspection derives from a particular philosophical standpoint.

In the ‘Proemiale Epistola’ of *De l’infinito* Bruno emphasises the struggle that he has already undergone in his efforts to fulfil this objective: ‘per amor della vera sapienza e studio della vera contemplazione, m’affatico, mi crucio, mi tormento’ (*De l’infinito* II.10). ‘Il camino della verità’ requires strength and energy. Bruno then considers the relationship between this pursuit of knowledge and time: ‘al disporsi bisogna tempo, discorso, studio e fatica’ (*Furori* II.729). However, he understands that time on Earth is fleeting and consequently one must avoid wasting it at all costs: ‘Questi non denno in cose leggieri e vane spendere il tempo, la cui velocità è infinita: essendo che sì mirabilmente precipitoso

<sup>127</sup> See Hélène Védrine, *La conception de la nature chez Giordano Bruno* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967) for a full and detailed explanation of Bruno’s hierarchy of the soul/mind/body. Bruno often elaborates three degrees of knowledge, ‘sensus, ratio, intellectus’ and sometimes also a fourth - ‘mens’. While the *intellectus* refers to immediate and intuitive knowledge, the *mens* ‘se définit alors comme un “acte parfaitement simple” qui contemple toute chose “sans succession, c’est-à-dire sans différence entre passé, présent et future” (p. 315).

<sup>128</sup> See Sergius Koderer, ‘Timid Mathematicians vs. Daring Explorers of the Infinite Cosmos: Giordano Bruno, Literary Self-Fashioning and *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*’, in *The Making of Copernicus: Early Modern Transformations of the Scientist and his Science*, ed. by Wolfgang Neuber, Thomas Rahn & Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 242.

scorra il presente, e con la medesima prestezza s'accoste il futuro' (*Furori* II.688). Even in the *Candelaio* - a text which was written just before a period of intense literary activity - Bruno's willingness to exploit time is clear: 'Però fa di mestiero di ben risolversi a tempo. Chi tempo aspetta, tempo perde. S'io aspetto il tempo, il tempo non aspetterà me' (*Candelaio* I.315). Time waits for nobody - it is waiting to be grasped, and Bruno believes that the most meaningful way to do this is by seeking the light of truth. In this section I briefly explore these ideas in more detail, moving from the truth of nature as Bruno's primary objective towards an analysis of introspection as the most productive use of time.

Across the Italian dialogues Bruno emphasises his desire to pursue a particular kind of truth, and as a result, he despairs at those individuals who have wasted precious time on what he considers to be the 'wrong' philosophy. In a typical passage from *De la causa* Bruno remarks that in ancient times, and especially the pre-Socratic era, there existed 'quelli filosofi [che] hanno ritrovata la sua amica Sofia, li quali hanno ritrovata questa unità' (*De la causa* I.730). 'Questa unità' refers to the unity of the infinite universe, and Bruno believed that those individuals who proposed such theories (Anaximander, Democritus and - later - Epicurus) had begun to access real truth about the nature of the world. Yet this initial connection to nature was lost for centuries due to Aristotle and others '[che] non hanno compreso il modo d'intendere di veri sapienti' (*De la causa* I.730).<sup>129</sup> In line with Bruno's notion of endless recurrence and epistemology, the Italian philosopher condemns the manner in which Scholasticism distorted the connection between human beings and nature: 'pervertere le sentenze de gli antichi et opporsi a la verità...' (*De la causa* I.730). An individual who persists in studying such philosophy is 'un che spende il miglior intervallo di tempo, e gli più scelti frutti di sua vita corrente, destillando l'elixir del cervello con...que' gravi tormenti, que' razionali discorsi, que' faticosi pensieri' (*Furori* II.488). Valuable time has been wasted in attempting to know the truth about nature from the foundation that Aristotle provided. Instead, Bruno believes that his conception of the infinite universe is a renewal of ancient theories and thus heralds a new time in history, one that will encourage an enjoyment of existing in the present rather than worrying over the future: 'lo libera dalla sollecita cura di piaceri e cieco sentimento di dolori; lo fa godere dell'esser presente, e non più temere che sperare del futuro' (*De l'infinito* II.25).

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<sup>129</sup> Incidentally, Aristotle was also a famous proponent of the contemplative life over the active life - another characteristic of the thinker's philosophy which may not have endeared him to Bruno. For more on Aristotle and this debate see Richard Kraut, 'Aristotle on Becoming Good: Habituation, Reflection and Perception' in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. by Christopher Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Bruno's enthusiasm for his philosophy is consistent throughout the Italian dialogues but arguably reaches its apotheosis in the *Eroici Furori*. One of the major themes of the *Furori* embraces a quest for truth dependent on one's energy, a concept which some critics argue has been carried over from Aristotelian principles.<sup>130</sup> The future comes to be infused with the possibility of accessing the divine truth of nature; thus Bruno devotes himself to knowing the infinite universe as much as possible: 'A l'infinito m'ergo' (*Infinito* II.31). Indeed, while Bruno believes that he has already made an important step towards revealing the true nature of the world, there is still plenty more to discover about nature: 'Oltre questo, voglio che apprendiate più capi di quest importantissima scienza e di questo fondamento solidissimo de la veritadi e secreti di natura' (*De la causa* I.733). In a very similar manner to the *Essais* we gain an important sense of the open-ended nature of Bruno's objective in writing; time endures, and within it Bruno's discussions will circulate, ideas will always be replaced by one another: 'si possono ridurre in cenere uomini e libri, senza impedire però che il pensiero continui a circolare, che le parole possano trasudare entusiasmo e trasmettere passione'.<sup>131</sup> How does time affect this objective? Namely, what does Bruno understand to be the most productive use of time? The *Furori* portray a restless Bruno who is searching furiously for a discovery that will lead him to know profound truth about the world. This process takes the form of a series of symbols, allegories and poetry that attempts to portray the limitations of human knowledge - it quickly becomes clear that many of these symbols are heavily linked to time.

In the *Furori* Bruno exhorts an inward retreat into oneself, drawing on Platonic sources in order to advocate a path to knowledge that offers the slim possibility of leaving the mortal body behind and penetrating the divine secrets of nature. Waller states that the resulting turmoil signifies the central conundrum of the *Eroici Furori*:

He [Bruno] sees man as being continually challenged to reach out to the future, since his destiny can be achieved only through the passage of time: 'Man is placed upon the limits of time and eternity, between perfection and its faint imperfect image'. Only by reaching for the infinite within time can man achieve his authentic stature.<sup>132</sup>

Bruno must fully exploit time and 'reach for the infinite' in order to gain a chance of understanding eternity, but as I briefly suggested above, this requires deep and studied

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<sup>130</sup> See Canone, p. 275.

<sup>131</sup> Ordine, p. 187.

<sup>132</sup> Waller, 'Renaissance Ideas of Time', p. 11.

introspection rather than utilising traditional modes of religious worship. Bruno does not even look outwards towards the infinite universe; instead, he examines the depths of his soul.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, the divinity that Bruno seeks is effectively one inside himself.<sup>134</sup> Bruno's incorporation of the myth of Actaeon is central to understanding this process; while he consistently expresses this idea in several ways throughout the *Furori*, the myth of Actaeon is his most well-known allegory. Bruno first mentions 'il mito di Atteone' in the fourth dialogue of the *Furori*, in a sonnet that describes how Actaeon, the mythical huntsman, transforms from 'cacciator' to 'caccia'. Destiny leads Actaeon and his hunting dogs to accidentally chance upon the goddess Diana bathing in the forest: 'il giovan Atteon, quand'il destino/gli drizz'il dubio et incauto camino' (*Furori* II.575). Diana is enraged and transforms Actaeon into a stag; his hounds set upon him, and Actaeon becomes the *caccia* not the *cacciatore*: 'e 'l gran cacciator dovenne caccia' (*Furori* II.575) - the hunter becomes the hunted. In the dialogue that follows this sonnet, Bruno equates the famous myth to his purpose in writing. According to Tansillo: 'Atteone significa l'intelletto intento alla caccia della divina sapienza, all'apprension della beltà divina' (*Furori* II.576). He suggests that intellect precedes *voluntade* but that the latter is 'più vigorosa et efficace' (*Furori* II.576) - only a firm desire to access 'divina sapienza' will set an individual on the right track.

Furthermore, there is a significant meaning behind Bruno's deliberate presentation of the myth in the form of a sonnet. Poetry is like nature - its true meaning must be unearthed from behind the surface of the words, which is what Tansillo is attempting to do in the text. He explains what Actaeon represents, acknowledging the (natural) setting of the forest as symbolic of a place rarely visited by humans: 'luoghi inculti e solitarii' (*Furori* II.576).<sup>135</sup> The road to a deeper understanding of what nature represents requires another level of effort: 'più spinoso, inculto e deserto il destro et arduo camino...' (*Furori* II.5756). In the myth, Actaeon the subject and Diana (divinity) the object merge, in a 'death' that highlights how the divine was always within the subject,

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<sup>133</sup> 'True insight comes about not by looking to the infinite skies, but rather by a form of radical introspection.' Sergius Koderer, 'Timid Mathematicians vs. Daring Explorers of the Infinite Cosmos: Giordano Bruno, Literary Self-Fashioning and *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*', in *The Making of Copernicus: Early Modern Transformations of the Scientist and his Science*, ed. by Wolfgang Neuber, Thomas Rahn and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 229-250 (p. 234).

<sup>134</sup> 'On en vient à cette conséquence : les Fureurs héroïques répondent psychologiquement au besoin le plus intime de l'âme qui tente de trouver une vérité stable pour se reposer en elle.' Védrine, p. 49.

<sup>135</sup> See Rowland, 'Introduction'. Augustine employs the same forest metaphor in relation to knowledge about the world: 'From them grant us space for our meditations on the secret recesses of your law, and do not close the gate to us as we knock. It is not for nothing that by your will so many pages of scripture are opaque and obscure. These forests are not without deer which recover their strength in them and restore themselves by walking and feeding, by resting and ruminating' (p. 222).

‘non era necessario di cercare fuor di sé la divinità’ (*Furori* II.578). Actaeon is ‘convertito in quel che cercava’ (*Furori* II.578), an idea which symbolises the need to look inwardly into oneself and to the World Soul for divine knowledge - ‘qua finisce la sua vita secondo il mondo pazzo, sensuale, cieco e fantastico’ (*Furori* II.579). Human life is over and instead Actaeon ‘vive vita de dèi, pascesi d’ambrosia et inebriasi di nettare’ (*Furori* II.579). At the same time, the dialogue form employed here - which involves the presentation of a sonnet and a discussion of the poem afterwards - allows Bruno to demonstrate the benefits of jointly analysing symbols and allegories to reach deeper meanings (an outward perspective I return to in further detail below).

The *Furori* is a text constantly affirming Bruno’s aspiration to higher knowledge and his belief in the idea that human potential should strive towards a more fulfilling purpose in life. This series of rich dialogues reconcile several strands rooted in Bruno’s vision of time - vicissitude, journeying towards the divine, the role of fate and fortune. Furthermore, his perpetual search for truth is one that primarily requires the individual to look inside themselves for enlightenment. As in the *Essais*, this introspective process allows one to surpass the vicissitudes of temporal passage. Sergius Koderer has previously stated that:

...very few, very ingenious individual human beings may attain a more or less concise image of truth by turning to their physical and mental interiors; for it is there that they will find an embodied, sentient mirror of the infinite universe. Although this form of consciousness is subject to *fortuna* and vicissitude, it remains the only means to obtain (a fragmented) notion of the universe.<sup>136</sup>

Bruno encourages individuals to seek ideal truth and beauty in ecstatic revelation. A person will detach his or her soul from its body and send it forth to eternity. In much the same way as Montaigne and his attempt to ‘essay’ the flux and flow of human life, if he or she cannot actually do this then they should at least strive to do so: ‘L’intention de l’ouvrage est précisément de montrer que l’homme, par ses seules forces, est incapable de cette ascension métaphysique et que la défaite qu’il subit est glorieuse mais inévitable’.<sup>137</sup> Like the *Essais*, the Italian dialogues accept that humans will fight a losing battle against time in the pursuit of absolute truth, but one that is still necessary since the final goal (i.e., divine revelation) represents the worthiest of causes.

Thus far it appears that Bruno, like Montaigne, exhorts a largely introspective approach to seeking truth. However, the idea of putting knowledge to practical use in the

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<sup>136</sup> Koderer, p. 235.

<sup>137</sup> Michel, p. 57.

world around him also renders Bruno's epistemological quest slightly more complex than simply a form of introspection. This issue becomes most apparent when we consider Bruno as a *magus* or 'wise man'. Like many of his near contemporaries in the 1500s, such as Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576) and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), Bruno was deeply interested in magic. Furthermore, his magical works - many of which were written several years after the Italian dialogues - are characterised by their highly practical nature. At the start of *De magia* (c. 1590), Bruno describes a magician as 'a wise man who has the power to act'; he believes that magic should be considered as yet another way of revealing truth and can be used to benefit the rest of society.<sup>138</sup> In his other magical essays (particularly *De vinculis in genere*) Bruno works from a conception of magic founded on bonds and bonding that necessitates an outward perspective on the world.<sup>139</sup> Canone has emphasised that Bruno's intention in the *De magia naturalis* is one of praxis over theory; his interest in magic lies in 'la convinzione [...] che la conoscenza deve essere anche prassi e deve tradursi in un vantaggio per l'uomo e per la società'.<sup>140</sup> One of the key features of Bruno's magic is his insistence on the *spiritus* which flows through everything and thus unites everything; human beings are bonded to everything else and these bonds can (and should) be manipulated by the magician to reveal more about the true nature of things.<sup>141</sup> Therefore it can be argued that throughout Bruno's works, his striving for truth actually requires a simultaneous act of looking inwardly and outwardly - the *spiritus* flows through human beings themselves but also reveals the connections between humans and the rest of the world. Magicians must try and manipulate the *spiritus* which extends outwards to other bodies. Védrine provides one example of this manipulation by emphasising that according to Bruno, the true philosopher or *magus* can project images and signs onto other bodies using the force of the *spiritus phantasticus*.<sup>142</sup> Clearly magic represents another means towards accessing hidden truth which relies on an outward practicality rather than solely advocating introspection and self-study. Like Montaigne, Bruno's entreaty to look inwardly in the *Eroici Furori* is not the final word on the 'quest' for

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<sup>138</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, trans. and ed. by Richard J. Blackwell & Robert de Lucca (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 107.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Vittoria Perrone Compagni, 'Le opere magiche di Giordano Bruno. Note di lettura', *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 57.2 (2002), pp. 201-224 (p. 204).

<sup>141</sup> '[Every]soul and spirit has some degree of continuity with the universal spirit, which is recognized to be located not only where the individual soul lives and perceives, but also to be spread out everywhere in its essence and substance, as many Platonists and Pythagoreans have taught' (Bruno, *Essays on Magic*, p. 112).

<sup>142</sup> See Védrine, p. 311. 'C'est à ce niveau supérieur que le *spiritus phantasticus* devient pleinement efficace et que l'image, portée par ce corps subtil qu'est le *spiritus* peut s'imprimer comme un sceau sur l'âme d'autrui' (p. 311).

knowledge - he considers magic to be another valid form of discovering truth about the world which requires an awareness of the *spiritus* that binds us all to nature.

Bruno also displays an outward perspective on practicality and the role of religion in *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*. The philosopher was motivated to write the *Spaccio* - a thinly-veiled criticism of religion - after witnessing the bloody effects of religious absolutism across Europe, from forced conversions to wars and public executions.<sup>143</sup> However, the excommunicated Dominican friar did believe that religion had a place in society, despite his 'heretical' philosophy (which would eventually see him burned at the stake by Catholics). Bruno despised the tendency of religions to present themselves as the 'one true faith' and he was convinced that religion should operate in a similar manner to the civic religions of the Roman Empire, i.e. it was to be used as a moral and ethical guide, rather than possessing absolute power over the population. For the purposes of this discussion, Bruno's criticism of *iustitia sola fide* is particularly relevant. *Sola fide* was the Protestant belief that an individual's relationship with God was forged exclusively through faith - performing good works no longer guaranteed salvation. Bruno took issue with this belief and criticises the manner in which Lutherans and Calvinists had shed blood over such a passive approach to salvation: 'non fanno altra opra che dir male de l'opre' (*Spaccio* II.238). Naturally this doctrine clashed with Bruno's views on the best way to utilise time; *sola fide* devalued the notion of good works, but Bruno believed that it also risked discouraging human beings from seeking out truth.<sup>144</sup> As such, he refers to the Reformers in disparaging terms as being worse than 'li bruchi e le locuste sterili' (*Spaccio* II.240). Like Bruno's magical works, it is essential to keep in mind that - despite his heartfelt commitment to pursuing introspection as a way to access truth - Bruno was simultaneously aware of the role of philosophy in wider society. His critique of *sola fide* demonstrates a desire to criticise anything which might endanger a practical pursuit of knowledge.

In previous chapters I illustrated the temporally finite body and emphasised that even if Bruno does not believe humans truly die, they are guaranteed to change form in some way (in his magical works Bruno refers to death as a process of 'recombination' in

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<sup>143</sup> Eugenio Canone, 'Bruno e la fine di tutte le cose. Sui motivi apocalittici dello "Spaccio"', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 2 (2004), pp. 269-282 (p. 270). For more on the issue of *sola fide* in Bruno's works, see Alberto Ingegno, *La sommersa nave della religione: studio sulla polemica anticristiana del Bruno* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1985).

<sup>144</sup> Ordine, p. 105.

which neither the body nor soul truly perishes).<sup>145</sup> Eternity presents the possibility of accessing divine knowledge in a similar manner to Actaeon: '[Atteone] è rinovato a procedere divinamente e più leggermente, cioè con maggior facilità e con una più efficace lena a' luoghi più folti, alli deserti, alla reggion de cose incomprensibili' (*Furori* II.579). Here divine knowledge is likened to exploring the more mysterious regions of the world - 'luoghi più folti...deserti' - in order to try and understand the most incomprehensible things. Bruno admits that time represents an obstacle to this process: 'Quella ancora ha certi termini di lunga vita; ma costui per infinite differenze di tempo et innumerabilie caggioni de circostanze, ha di breve vita termini incerti' (*Furori* II.614). Life is short but the length of the journey towards knowledge of 'cose incomprensibili' is indeterminable and thus remains open-ended. However, while human time is finite and defined by constant flux, in the *Eroici Furori* one can devote one's efforts in the present moment to looking inwardly towards the World Soul: 'la verità alla quale in ogni tempo, in ogni etade et in qualsivoglia stato che si trove l'uomo, sempre aspira, e per cui suol spreggiar qualsivoglia fatica, tentar ogni studio' (*Furori* II.691). In *Giordano Bruno* (1990) Michele Ciliberto recognises that Bruno considers his existence within the limitations of the human body:

Nel suo ragionamento Bruno prende le mosse da una considerazione fondamentale: in questa "terrena vita", l'uomo sta in un doppio limite: e ciò incide, direttamente, nel suo rapporto con le "cose divine". Anzitutto, è "rinchiuso in questa priggione de la carne, ed avinto da questi nervi, e confermato da queste ossa". Sta, cioè, in un limite oggettivo, corporeo.<sup>146</sup>

This 'limite oggettivo, corporeo' is only a limit because of its temporal existence - the human body exists in this 'terrena vita', one that is defined by human mortality.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, 'cose divine' are eternal, and in the Italian dialogues, divinity represents a higher truth that Bruno desperately wishes to attain. Ciliberto has already begun to describe this intellectual journey to attain divine knowledge in temporal terms - such an achievement would represent a 'possibilità di oltrepassare il tempo, il finito'.<sup>148</sup> Bruno's

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<sup>145</sup> 'This is what alteration, mutation, passion and even corruption are: namely, the separation of certain parts from others, and their recombination with still others. For death is nothing more than such a disintegration. No spirit and no body ever perishes; rather, there is only continual change of combinations and actualizationist.' (Bruno, *Essays on Magic*, p. 126)

<sup>146</sup> Michele Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno* (Roma: Laterza, 1990), p. 179.

<sup>147</sup> Michel remarks that Bruno believes 'nous sommes confinés en une zone' (p. 57). Furthermore, 'toutes les Fureurs se déroulent entre cette souffrance d'une réussite impossible et cette certitude que l'opération doit être tentée' (p. 48).

<sup>148</sup> Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 178.



works advocate a constant dedication to seeking truth in the present moment, mindful of the promise this may hold for the future. Bruno concludes thus: ‘Conchiudesi dunque che a chi cerca il vero, bisogna montar sopra la raggione de cose corporee’ (*Furori* II.692); in other words, he desires to go beyond ‘la raggione de cose corporee’ and his use of time is fuelled entirely by this notion. Time flows endlessly, but human beings can attempt to access the eternity that exists within ourselves through practising a focused devotion to uncovering the true workings of nature. Montaigne and Bruno understand that in order to act productively they have to accept the conditions of their existence in time and continue to learn and know about the world anyway, despite the uncertainty that temporal impermanence creates.

At the start of this chapter I examined eternity, the final element within their conception of time. Although eternity often possessed an important relationship to 16th-century conceptions of time, in the *Essais* Montaigne paid little attention to it and instead devoted significant passages to emphasising the constantly fluctuating nature of the passage of time. Bruno employed some conventional ideas of eternity in his writing, but they were integrated into a heretical 16th-century cosmology that placed God directly into the universe. The second part of this chapter explored how Montaigne and Bruno consider the best way to use time. Despite approaching this issue from very different philosophical outlooks, both thinkers encourage introspection in order to try and act productively and seek knowledge in a world of temporal uncertainty. Whether or not Montaigne will ever manage to pin down the true essence of himself, or Bruno will ever penetrate divine knowledge, both thinkers insist that an individual must continue to exploit time productively anyway.<sup>149</sup> In Chapter Four, I continue to explore how both thinkers examine living in a temporal world by analysing their thoughts on custom and the potential stability that tradition provides along the passage of time.

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<sup>149</sup> Nuccio Ordine has even used this determination to briefly but directly compare Montaigne and Bruno: ‘nella prospettiva di Bruno, non è determinante raggiungere l’obiettivo’ (p. 141).

## Chapter Four: Time and Custom

One of the central challenges faced by Montaigne and Bruno was how they might attempt to establish truth when the world around them existed primarily in a state of temporal flux. If everything from mountains and trees to humans themselves are continually coming into being and then passing away, then - with the exception of eternity - what can be said to endure for any significant length of time? In practical terms, how do Montaigne and Bruno identify stable and universal truths about nature when the very world they are trying to learn about is constantly changing? Arguably, one important way in which thinkers understood duration was by appealing to the notion of custom. During the early modern period, custom possessed several specific meanings that are now unfamiliar to modern audiences.

In its primary sense, custom usually referred to a system of unofficial laws that were unique to specific locales or regions; such laws had often existed alongside the codified civil law of the land for many centuries.<sup>1</sup> In the 1500s, civil law and its counterpart, custom, together formed a popular topic of debate amongst European jurists in response to questions of time and duration. Furthermore, custom also signified 'second nature'; it described the customary bent or habits unique to a given individual that unconsciously guided many aspects of their everyday behaviour.<sup>2</sup> The idea of second nature, which Hamlet famously referred to as 'that monster, custome', was frequently debated in light of its role in developing habitual behaviour over long periods.<sup>3</sup> Under all of its various guises, custom poses an interesting dilemma in light of Montaigne's quest for self-knowledge and Bruno's desire to access divine knowledge. Bruno was frustrated by custom's propensity to encourage the passive reception of truths since this impeded the *novità* of his ideas, while Montaigne was concerned with the legitimacy that custom thrived on since it challenged the questioning bent of his thought in the *Essais*.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lawrence Manley, *Convention 1500-1750* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 67-105. Manley describes 16th-century customary law as 'those ceremonial rites and orders, customary forms and apparently arbitrary practices that constitute a class of norms whose rationale was neither immediately conspicuous nor articulate' (p. 90).

<sup>2</sup> See Donald R. Kelley, 'Second Nature: The Idea of Custom in European Law, Society & Culture', in *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Anthony Grafton & Ann Blair (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 131-172. Kelley's research has proved particularly useful in the writing of this chapter; while his focus clearly lies in the idea of custom as second nature, he also provides excellent context on its other uses in early modern Europe.

<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Three-Text Hamlet: Parallel Texts of the First and Second Quartos and First Folio*, ed. by Bernice W. Kliman & Paul Bertram (New York: AMS Press, 2003), III.4.163. See Kelley, pp. 131-133.

In this chapter, I explore these ideas in more detail through an examination of the interplay between time and custom. If Montaigne and Bruno approached the question of time in new and original ways, then it is reasonable to assume that this temporal innovation naturally affected other aspects of their thought. Custom emerged as a particularly useful topic due to its ability to thrust abstract and philosophical thoughts on time - such as vicissitude, mortality, and access to divine knowledge - into a more practical light (Ricardo Quinones presents custom as a popular 16th-century concept that nevertheless forced human beings to accept their 'natural limitations').<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, this chapter will bring another perspective to bear on the already fine scholarship in circulation on early modern custom, by framing it within the conception of time that I have outlined so far in this thesis. Unlike time, Montaigne and Bruno both understand custom in familiar 16th-century terms. However, I argue that their frustration with many of its attributes stems from a shared desire to harness time productively. As a result, an analysis of custom in both of their works reveals some of the closest points of comparison between Montaigne and Bruno thus far.

Here I examine the first two dialogues from Bruno's *Cena de le ceneri* and two chapters from the first volume of the *Essais*: 'Du Jeune Caton' (I.XXXVII), 'Des Cannibales' and 'De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receue' (I.XXIII). The *Cena* is the first text in the Italian dialogues and it has also received the most critical attention.<sup>5</sup> This is largely due to its controversial nature - it is the first dialogue in which Bruno systematically sets out his heliocentric universe. Nuccio Ordine has stated that the *Cena* represents 'la creazione di un nuovo inizio, di una nuova cosmologia capace di distruggere le catene del geocentrismo'.<sup>6</sup> However, instead of immediately setting forth this new philosophy, the first two dialogues of the *Cena* outline aspects of Bruno's understanding of human civilisation - a reliance on custom and traditional ways of thinking form a large part of this discussion.

Meanwhile, the three chapters from the *Essais* addressed here are also well-known to modern scholars. 'Des Cannibales' is arguably Montaigne's most famous chapter and was written around 1579; it received little in the way of alteration after the initial draft and represented a fascinating exploration of otherness and judgement which often draws upon the customs of Native Americans. The 2007 *Pléiade* edition of the *Essais* notes that

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<sup>4</sup> Ricardo J. Quinones, 'Views of Time in Shakespeare', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 26.3 (1965), pp. 327-352 (p. 345).

<sup>5</sup> For arguments on the status of the *Candelaio* as the first text see Nuccio Ordine, 'Introduzione' in Giordano Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, 2 vols, ed. by Nuccio Ordine (Turin, UTET 2002).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

an early draft of ‘De la coustume’ was completed around 1572, while ‘Du Jeune Caton’ was written around 1573 and received substantial additions after 1588.<sup>7</sup> In ‘Du Jeune Caton’, Montaigne deals primarily with the virtues of Cato the Younger, ‘une des figures tutélaires des *Essais*’.<sup>8</sup> He considers Cato to be a model of Roman civic virtue and an exemplary Stoic hero, while also discussing the nature of virtue more generally. Custom receives heavy criticism throughout this discussion. ‘De la coustume’ is a lengthy chapter that moves from discussing the internalisation of time through mental cognition to ‘une maîtresse qui contraint l’homme de l’extérieur, la coutume’.<sup>9</sup> Custom as law is systematically dissected as Montaigne explains its precarious authority and the dulling effects it has over the human mind, a discussion which, as we will see, shares many similarities with the representation of custom in Bruno’s works.

## Context: Custom and Time in the 16th century

Like Montaigne and Bruno, the majority of 16th-century thinkers were highly aware of the advantages *and* disadvantages that custom generated, and modern-day scholars have already identified several key debates that emerged as a result of the continued presence of custom in European society.<sup>10</sup> In the late 16th century custom primarily referred to a system of unofficial laws that were based on local practices. This collection of customary laws had originally held an important status within Medieval law, and their existence continued into the early modern period as well:

La coutume, droit non écrit ou codifié tardivement, et établie sur des usages locaux, constitue l’essentiel de la pensée juridique du Moyen Age; malgré l’extension du *droict romain*, le *droict coutumier* joue encore un rôle dominant au XVIe siècle. La persistance de la coutume, forme sociale de l’imitation, angoisse devant les innovations qui paraissaient inéluctables, est une manifestation des attitudes contradictoires que la pensée collective du XVIe siècle a vécues à l’égard du temps.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonen (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), pp. 1333, 1372 & 1437.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 1437.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 1372.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief summary of the history of debates over custom in France, see Françoise Joukovsky, *Montaigne et le problème du temps* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), pp. 144-150.

<sup>11</sup> Georges Matoré, ‘Le temps au XVIe siècle’, *L’Information Grammaticale*, 32 (1987), pp. 3-8 (p. 7).

As Georges Matoré states above, customary law still played a dominant role in 16th-century society. And yet it existed alongside the official legal system of the country; there was a sharp distinction between custom as *mores* or *consuetudines* and civil law or *leges*.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, there was an official written law which signified the will of the ruler, and then, on the other hand was the law of custom, whose original purpose had usually been forgotten. Sovereign law was often referred to as *droict romain* in French (see the quotation by Matoré above) after the notoriously strict nature of Ancient Roman law, while custom was the slightly murkier ‘ensemble d’usages collectifs mis en pratique dans la nuit des temps, bien avant d’être codifiés’.<sup>13</sup> The first type of law was applied to everyone in the land, it was decreed by the ruler and must be submitted to whether subjects like it or not. However, custom was the effect of common consent, of which the origin had long been forgotten.<sup>14</sup> Well-known jurists such as Louis Le Caron (1534-1613) believed that the codified law of the land was exercised by weight of reason, which was considered to be timeless.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, in France customs were proven to exist *par turbe*, ‘that is, by an interrogation of a representative sample of members of a social group or profession by the presiding judge’.<sup>16</sup> A local usage was proclaimed to be a customary law if it ‘had existed “from time immemorial,” [...] limited time periods were also acceptable’.<sup>17</sup> In other words, customs were arguably exercised due to the length of their existence in time.

A certain collective mindset still existed in the late 1500s that accepted the authority of laws which often had no clear origin in time. However, it must be briefly

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<sup>12</sup> Ullrich Langer, ‘Montaigne’s Customs’, *Montaigne Studies*, 4.1-2 (1992), pp. 81-96 (p. 83). Montaigne was extremely familiar with French juridical procedures, having served as a magistrate with the *Coustumier de Guyenne*. For more on this aspect of Montaigne’s life, see André Tournon, *Montaigne: la glose et l’essai* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983). For more on Montaigne and the juridical difficulties surrounding custom, see Stéphan Geonget, ‘Montaigne et la question des “doubles loix” (I.23)’, *Bulletin de la Société des amis de Montaigne*, (2011), pp. 49-66.

<sup>13</sup> André Tournon, ‘Coutume’ in *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: H. Champion, 2004), pp. 230-233 (p. 230).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For further context on debates amongst well-known jurists from this period, see Stéphan Geonget, “Je compare la loy au Roy, & la coustume au tyran”. Débats entre juristes de la fin de la Renaissance’, in *La coutume: formes, représentations et enjeux - 4e Rencontres internationales La Boétie de Sarlat* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), pp. 69-86. See also Langer, ‘Montaigne’s Customs’, p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Langer, ‘Montaigne’s Custom’, p. 83. For an excellent introduction to custom in Renaissance England, which also highlights concerns from other European countries at that time, see William M. Hamlin, ‘Florio’s Montaigne and the Tyranny of “Custome”’: Appropriation, Ideology, and Early English Readership of the *Essays*’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 63.2 (2010), pp. 491-544. Hamlin argues that custom interested Montaigne’s studious English readers the most; while Montaigne’s conclusion to this particular subject is ambiguous, ‘early English readers were less willing to reserve their judgement’ (p. 492). For a detailed explanation of the *par turbe* authentication of customs, see Kelley, ‘Second Nature’, p. 139.

<sup>17</sup> Langer, ‘Montaigne’s Customs’, p. 84.

noted that this state of affairs was not fully supported by many leading European lawmakers. In the late 1400s, Louis XI had already proposed a series of major reforms with the aim of unifying French customs, only for those reforms to peter out after his death in 1483.<sup>18</sup> The 16th century signalled another push for reforms across Europe; lawmakers in England, Germany and Spain ‘made Latin commentaries on vernacular texts, customs as well as statutes, and so did studies of comparative law at least implicitly, whether invidiously or approvingly’.<sup>19</sup> In France between 1560 and 1582, Christofle de Thou (1508-1582), a ‘champion of legal uniformity’ and the president of the *parlement de Paris* began a series of further reforms, travelling the country in an attempt to synthesise local and regional laws.<sup>20</sup> A question mark hung over the efficacy of observing several sets of laws at the same time, particularly ones which varied from place to place and whose origins were often unclear.

Custom also possessed other distinct meanings. Randle Cotgrave’s English-French dictionary of 1611 translates *coutume* as ‘habit, manner; continuall fashion, or order’ as well as the ‘ancient Law, or custome in a countrey’.<sup>21</sup> Custom was not only a set of laws - it also referred to an individual’s ‘second nature’ or the personal habit or bent of one’s disposition.<sup>22</sup> William Hamlin emphasises its personal nature and describes it as ‘an individual human’s established manner of being in the world: it refers to personal habit, routine, comportment, or practice, and as such may be said to belong to an individual rather than to a group’.<sup>23</sup> Kelley defines custom as a shadow of primitive human nature and argues that 16th-century debates surrounding second nature (*consuetudo altera natura*) had been a commonplace since Aristotle’s day.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Xavier Martin, ‘Vie et destinée des coutumes françaises, 1454-1804: Essai de synthèse’, *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 93.4 (2015), pp. 529-558 (p. 532).

<sup>19</sup> Donald R. Kelley, ‘Law’, in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought (1450-1700)*, ed. by J.H. Burns & Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 66-94 (pp. 81-82).

<sup>20</sup> Kelley, ‘Second Nature’, p. 142. For more on de Thou’s role in customary reform see Martin, p. 536.

<sup>21</sup> Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Adam Islip, 1611), ‘Coustume’.

<sup>22</sup> I have already briefly highlighted where Montaigne refers to the *pli* of the human body as its customary ‘bent’. See Chapter One, ‘Montaigne, death and ageing’.

<sup>23</sup> Hamlin, p. 498. It must be noted that Hamlin has incorporated his discussion on custom into a larger monograph exploring Montaigne’s early English readership; see William M. Hamlin, *Montaigne’s English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare’s Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Kelley, ‘Second Nature’, p. 131. Aristotle had already discussed the possibility of habit becoming natural in the *Art Rhetorica* (p. 131). Many Renaissance thinkers were also concerned about the relationship between custom and nature. Custom was arguably supplanting natural laws and replacing them with artificial ones specific to certain regions; for more on this see Ricardo J. Quinones, ‘Views of Time in Shakespeare’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 26.3 (1965), pp. 327-352 (p. 345).

Furthermore, modern scholars of Renaissance custom have outlined an important trend stemming from *consuetudo altera natura* which links heavily to Christian eschatology. According to Hamlin, 16th-century convention involved ‘situating all human cultures within a biblical narrative that explains custom with reference to the Fall’.<sup>25</sup> Once more, it was St. Augustine who had already begun to ponder such a timeline in detail; Augustine and the other early Church fathers viewed second nature as a surrender to humanity’s corrupting nature.<sup>26</sup> Augustine invoked custom as habit in order to explain ‘the permanence of habitual, repetitive evil in the soul of the impenitent sinner. [...] Habitual sin, ultimately ineradicable, stubbornly insinuated itself into the inner life of the sinner until it became second nature’.<sup>27</sup> Not only did this become an explanation for the corruption of individual human beings, but it also referred to a collective and sinful habit that had led to the degeneration of humanity for centuries. Humans had fallen from God’s grace, and the ongoing development of civilisation continued to sever human beings from the divine.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Shakespeare’s exploration of second nature in *Hamlet* is merely a reflection of what Cefalu has labelled as a popular Augustinian-Protestant preoccupation with habit, sin, and action.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1500s, jurists were considering whether or not to incorporate enduring common law into civil law, while theologians had shaped second nature into a Biblical narrative concerning innate human corruption. In both cases, it is clear that custom generated its authority from its ability to exist over long periods, and many thinkers had already made this link between custom and time explicit. Writing in 1595, Le Caron lamented that customary law was upheld due to time rather than reason, and made efforts to stress the atemporal (and thus preferable) nature of civil law: ‘la coustume n’a souvent pour raison que l’usage: mais la loy est fondée en raison naturelle ou civile’.<sup>30</sup> The French

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<sup>25</sup> Hamlin, p. 505.

<sup>26</sup> Kelley, ‘Second Nature’, p. 131.

<sup>27</sup> Paul A. Cefalu, “‘Damnéd Custom...Habits Devil’: Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”, Anti-Dualism, and the Early Modern Philosophy of Mind”, *ELH*, 67.2 (2000), pp. 399-431 (p. 409). In ‘Second Nature’, Kelley explains the Biblical foundation to this debate: ‘Emblematic of this deep-seated prejudice was the reminder of Cyprian, often repeated (by Luther among others) and preserved in canon law, that Christ had represented himself not as the “custom” but rather as the “truth”, referring to John 14:6, “Sed Dominus noster Christus veritatem se non consuetudinem cognominavit” (p. 133).

<sup>28</sup> See Richard Handler, ‘Of Cannibals and Custom: Montaigne’s Cultural Relativism’, *Anthropology Today*, 2.5 (1986), pp. 12-14 (p. 13).

<sup>29</sup> Cefalu, p. 428. Kelley emphasises that it is important to remember that custom wasn’t a wholly Christian appropriation and that the idea of nature/second nature ‘outlasted the medieval Christian formulation’ (p. 133).

<sup>30</sup> Louis Charondas Le Caron, *Pandectes ou digestes du droit françois*, 1st. edn (Paris: P. L’Huillier, 1607), p. 398. For a detailed discussion of this quotation and other passages found in Le Caron’s assessment of custom, see Langer, ‘Montaigne’s Customs’, pp. 82-83.

lawyer Estienne Pasquier (1529-1615) set forth an exact definition of how many years constituted ‘time immemorial’, which was considered to be the necessary length of time for a law to be considered customary: ‘je tien qu’il fault une possession immémoriale, c’est a dire cent ans’.<sup>31</sup> As Rab Houston has recently suggested, the idea of custom as long practice was central to English definitions of the term, and this characteristic applied equally to European countries including France, Spain and Germany.<sup>32</sup> James Dalrymple, Viscount Stair (1619-1695) would later suggest that nations were happier ‘whose laws have entered by long custom’, since ‘through a tract of time’ experience would show whether they were acceptable and, if inconvenient, they would ‘prove abortive in the Womb of Time’.<sup>33</sup>

Memory was another temporal concept that thinkers were aware aided in the growing authority of a custom; again discussing the example of England, which has received a lot of attention from modern scholars, Houston remarks that ‘English society had a collective memory embedded in custom, which gave it a strong sense of its own identity’.<sup>34</sup> In other words, custom was a social contract which relied on collective memory to endure in time. According to Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634), an emphatic supporter of custom in the English legal system, “‘of every custom there be two essential parts, time and usage, time out of mind and continual and peaceable usage without lawful interruption’”.<sup>35</sup> It is these fundamental characteristics of custom that will direct much of the next part of the discussion.

## Custom and Time

### *Custom in the Essais and the Italian Dialogues*

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<sup>31</sup> Estienne Pasquier, *L’Interprétation des Institutes de Justinian avec la conférence de chasque paragraphe aux ordonnances royaux, arrestz de parlement et coustumes générales de la France*, ed. by M. le Duc Pasquier (Paris: V. Aîné, A. Durand, 1847), pp. 34-35.

<sup>32</sup> Rab Houston, ‘Custom in Context: Medieval and Early Modern Scotland and England’, *Past & Present*, 211.1 (2011), pp. 35-76 (p. 38). Houston suggests that customary law in Scotland was highly unusual in Europe since temporality was not a key feature of its implementation. Discussing custom in Europe, Kelley has also summarised that ‘the element of time remained central to the idea of custom’ (p. 137).

<sup>33</sup> James Dalrymple, Viscount of Stair, *The Institutions of the Law of Scotland: Deduced from its Originals, and Collated with the Civil, Canon and Feudal Laws, and with the Customs of Neighbouring Nations: in IV Books*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Andrew Anderson, 1693), p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Houston, p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> Manley, p. 218.



In the 16th century, custom's existence in time was considered to be threefold: its origins had often been forgotten, it endured for very long periods, and yet - as the idea of legal reform suggests - custom was not immune to time itself. Like everything else in time, it was mutable. In this section, I will explore in more detail the extent to which Montaigne and Bruno portray custom along these lines, highlighting where they engage with standard 16th-century ideas of custom and also emphasising significant points of connection between the two thinkers. First I examine how Montaigne and Bruno consider the effects of custom on human behaviour, a discussion which reveals itself to be highly critical of both common law and second nature. I then move on to assess the role of time in this portrayal through a detailed exploration of two distinct tropes: the New World and imagery of poisons and potions.

Interestingly, both Montaigne and Bruno introduce the adverse effects of custom through humour, satire, and comedy. They do so in order to highlight the manner in which custom can lead absurd or nonsensical behaviour to become normalised. Custom enjoys a lighthearted introduction into the texts discussed here as both thinkers begin by mocking customary laws (or *consuetudines* in Latin) and the institutions that represent them. Indeed, the opening lines of 'De la coustume' appear to clash with the rather solemn title of the chapter and its connection to legal concerns. Instead, Montaigne recounts 'la force de la coustume' in all of its absurdity with the following anecdote:

Celuy me semble avoir tres-bien conceu la force de la coustume, qui premier forgea ce conte, qu'une femme de village, ayant appris de caresser et porter entre ses bras un veau des l'heure de sa naissance, et continuant tousjours à ce faire, gagna cela par l'accoustumance, que tout grand beuf qu'il estoit, elle le portoit encore.  
(I.XXIII.108-109)

What exactly led the poor woman in this story to pursue such an unnatural line of behaviour?<sup>36</sup> Certain customs or usages may appear bizarre to other people, while those individuals who practice them are unaware of their true nature. The woman in question began by looking after a new-born calf - she enjoyed stroking it and carrying it around. Over time, the woman became accustomed to carrying the calf even as it slowly turned into a fully-grown cow in her arms, thus rendering the act a ridiculous farce to an outside observer such as Montaigne. This story was based on an anecdote taken from the Roman rhetorician Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* (95 AD) in which Milo of Croton, a renowned athlete, built up his strength by carrying a calf every day until it became a full-grown

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<sup>36</sup> Here the term 'unnatural' signifies defying the laws of nature or 'reigles de nature' (as Montaigne refers to them later in this particular chapter). For a description of what exactly these laws entail in the context of the *Essais*, see Ian Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp. 63-64.

bull.<sup>37</sup> As Langer remarks, this was a well-known story in the 16th century. However, whereas previous humanist references to the story interpreted the ability to carry the bull as a positive sign, Montaigne purposely skews this particular example in order to portray custom in a distinctly unfavourable light, highlighting the true power of custom at work through a humorous retelling of Quintilian's anecdote.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, in order to emphasise this point, he swiftly introduces a metaphor that describes custom as 'une violente et traistresse maistresse d'escole' (I.XXIII.109). Customary law is meant to educate human beings about how to live in the world, when in fact it betrays them, causing the silly and unnatural phenomenon of the *femme de village* carrying a fully-grown cow. Writing on the effects of custom in Shakespeare's plays, Ricardo J. Quinones notes that 'custom [...] is monster in dulling purpose and habituating the rational awareness to evil practice'. In Montaigne's case, I believe that the practice in question naturally appears nonsensical to an outsider, but the woman's 'rational awareness' has been eroded by custom to such a degree that she has normalised this strange behaviour.<sup>39</sup>

As with 'De la coustume', the opening lines of the first dialogue of the *Cena* introduce custom in a fairly tongue-in-cheek manner; here Bruno specifically criticises those people he believes are most guilty of upholding custom. Montaigne described custom as a traitorous school teacher, something that betrays when it is meant to teach. In a similar vein, Bruno begins by mocking Oxford dons and thus undermining their claim to authority - instead they are merely portrayed as people bent on upholding superficial traditions. The two main interlocutors, Teofilo and Smitho, commence the dialogue by discussing a pair of Oxford professors with whom the Nolan has met.<sup>40</sup> Smitho asks a series of short questions about the calibre of guests that will be attending the Ash Wednesday supper, to which Teofilo replies 'sì...sì': 'Parlavan ben latino?' 'Galantuomini?' 'Di buona riputazione?' He then asks how qualified the Oxford scholars are, to which Teofilo humorously responds:

Come non? uomini da scelta, di robba lunga, vestiti di velluto; un de' quali avea due catene d'oro lucente al collo, e l'altro, per Dio, con quella preziosa mano, che

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<sup>37</sup> Langer, 'Montaigne's Customs', p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Langer offers the following background: 'The calf-bull is given an obscene meaning in Petronius. There are many other references to the anecdote in Montaigne's time, such as in Guazzo's *La civil conversatione*. However, being able to carry the bull or cow is always interpreted as an advantage or ability, not as a constraint or enslavement' (Ibid., p. 89).

<sup>39</sup> Quinones, *Discovery of Time*, p. 345.

<sup>40</sup> Koderer discusses Bruno's use of 'the Nolan' instead of using the pronoun 'I'. He claims this is an example of Bruno trying to forge a new identity for himself as an author. Referring to himself in such a way allows Bruno to take himself out of the bounds of institutions to some degree. See Koderer, p. 230.

contenea dodici anella in due dita, sembrava un ricchissimo gioielliero, che ti cavava gli occhi ed il core, quando la vagheggiava. (*Cena* I.441-442)

Mocking the Oxford institutions he had disastrous encounters with during his second stay there, Bruno highlights the superficial nature of these so-called 'learned men' by focusing on their extravagant clothing. They resemble jewellery shops with all of their exaggerated finery, and yet it is these figures that are responsible for upholding the received wisdom of the English educational institutions. Clearly, Bruno considers them to be a joke, and he is quick to emphasise this point right from the start of the *Cena*. However, although Teofilo discerns their true, superficial nature, their authority is so deeply embedded in English society that they are generally considered to be gentlemen 'di buona riputazione', regardless of their ridiculous garb.

Despite the amusing nature of these examples, in both cases, the underlying message reveals a profoundly negative aspect of custom - namely, that custom gradually normalises nonsensical behaviour. Furthermore, custom continues this absurd hold over an individual due to its ability to imitate natural behaviour to a certain degree. In 'De la coustume', Montaigne recalls the somewhat disturbing example of a young girl, 'la fille qu'Albert recite s'estre accoustumée à vivre d'araignées' (I.XXIII.109). Custom successfully alters the natural feeding habits of the young girl, and instead she learns to eat spiders. However, while the nature of what she is eating is deeply unsettling to an outside observer, she herself has merely grown accustomed to it since she is still responding to the natural signs of hunger.

Rather than letting oneself be guided by nature in their everyday actions, individuals are guilty of following custom instead. As Hamlin states, 'for Montaigne, humanity's frailty proves only that custom is often a corrupting force, further distancing us from nature's providence and our own sufficiency'.<sup>41</sup> Custom has supplanted what is natural and instead, it succeeds in overturning 'les reigles de nature' by shaping someone's behaviour so completely that it appears to take the form of human instinct. This action allows custom to continue its hold over an individual undetected. A few pages later Montaigne remarks that 'les loix de la conscience, que nous disons naistre de nature, naissent de la coustume: chacun ayant en veneration interne les opinions et moeurs approuvées et receues autour de luy, ne s'en peut desprendre sans remors, ny s'y appliquer sans applaudissement' (I.XXIII.115). Here Montaigne admits that custom imitates second nature very effectively - often humans label their instincts as natural, but they may equally

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<sup>41</sup> Hamlin, p. 506.

be born of custom.<sup>42</sup> This idea is a startling admission by Montaigne, which suggests that the human conscience is a product of human culture - represented in this instance by custom - rather than nature. Hamlin has previously commented on Montaigne's distinction between the decreasing influence of nature compared with the rising influence of artifice.<sup>43</sup> In the examples above I offer an insight into Montaigne's portrayal of the decidedly abnormal consequences of custom's erosion of nature as it manifests itself through individual behaviour over time.

Custom gradually overrides natural behaviour with the absurd, and it is allowed to do so primarily due to an ability to imitate second nature. Time plays a central role in this process. In the *Essais* time is clearly labelled as a contributing factor towards the authority of the so-called traitorous school teacher; in one of the opening paragraphs of 'De la coustume', Montaigne states the following:

Elle [la coutume] établit en nous, peu à peu, à la desrobée, le pied de son autorité: mais par ce doux et humble commencement, l'ayant rassis et planté avec l'ayde du temps, elle nous descouvre tantost un furieux et tyrannique visage, contre lequel nous n'avons plus la liberté de hausser seulement les yeux. Nous luy voyons forcer, tous les coups, les reigles de nature. (I.XXIII.109)

Slowly but surely - 'avec l'ayde du temps' - custom strengthens its authority without an individual becoming consciously aware of it doing so. Then suddenly one may realise the degree of power that custom has accumulated. The more it manages to endure over time, the more authoritative it becomes - a characteristic which applies not only to second nature but also to common law.

It is important to note at this point in the discussion that Western Europe was being forced to confront a vastly different society from its own - the New World. The discovery of America had been a complete and utter surprise; the revelations that followed concerning the nature of its peoples were both fascinating and disturbing. Just over one hundred years after Columbus first discovered the continent, Europeans such as Montaigne were still trying to understand a people whose culture was unlike anything

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<sup>42</sup> In 'Des Destries' (I.XLVIII) Montaigne describes a custom of the Mammelus (partisan soldiers from the Savoy region): 'Les Mammelus se vantent d'avoir les plus adroits chevaux de gendarmes du monde. Et dict on que, *par nature et par coustume*, ils sont faits, par certains signes et voix, à ramasser aveq les dens les lances et les darts, et à les offrir à leur maistre en pleine meslée et à cognoistre et discerner' (I.XLVIII). See also Bruno, *Opere Latine*, trans. by Carlo Monti (Turin: UTET, 2013); on customs surrounding the covering of the genitals in different cultures, Bruno also attributes such behaviour to custom or nature: '[...] altri no' mostrarsi davanti a tutti e girare nudi con il membro in erezione non è disonorevole, turpe e indecoroso per tutte le specie degli esseri animati né per tutto il genere umano, ma per alcuni diventa tale *per natura*, per altri *per consuetudine*' (p. 112).

<sup>43</sup> See Hamlin, p. 507. 'Montaigne sees custom as a subcategory of artifice, and he suggests that artifice and nature have shaped human existence in an inverse ratio across the sweep of history' (p. 507).

they had ever encountered before. ‘Des Cannibales’ famously lists the most extreme *usages* of this society - ‘cet autre monde’ - in unflinching detail. One such case involves a flesh-eating ritual in which the native American tribes execute a prisoner and feed on him afterwards: ‘ils le rotissent et en mangent en commun et en envoient des lopins à ceux de leurs amis’ (I.XXXI.209). By mutilating and eating the body afterwards the remaining tribe members truly punish the prisoner - Montaigne calmly explains that this is not done to sustain themselves, but rather it represents ‘une extreme vengeance’. Despite the shocking nature of such an act, in ‘Des Cannibales’ Montaigne uses these customs to make his readers reflect on the nature of their own societal norms, particularly the role of civil law in Europe. Indeed, his discussion of the New World and property laws discussed below - which Bruno also highlights in the *Spaccio* - presents the Americas as a society in which common law has not had time to implant itself and in some cases does not exist at all.

The issue of property laws leads Montaigne and Bruno to criticise the violent and greedy nature of their society. America is a nation of people in which Montaigne writes ‘il n’y a aucune espece de trafique: [...] nuls contrats; nulles successions; nuls partages’ (I.XXXI.206). European Post-Reformation violence comes to the fore once again as Montaigne reflects on how ‘civilised’ Western Europe is in comparison to the newly-discovered lands across the ocean. Nature should exist above the petty concerns of territory and boundaries. However, as Montaigne sarcastically remarks, European society has desecrated nature with its inventions: ‘Ce n’est pas raison que l’art gaigne le point d’honneur sur nostre grande et puissante mere nature. Nous avons tant rechargé la beauté et richesse de ses ouvrages par nos inventions’ (I.XXXI.205-206). Montaigne criticises his society’s use of warfare and colonisation to carve up the land, while the Native Americans still live according to *loix naturelles* in spite of their cannibalism.

I would also argue that Montaigne’s insistence on highlighting to his readers the defects of European society in this way might encourage them to treat their fellow countrymen and women with tolerance and respect, not just the Native Americans. After all, Montaigne claims that we readily judge the faults of the cannibals and yet ‘nous soyons si aveuglez aux nostres’ (I.XXXI.209). The entire strategy of inversion that we have seen Montaigne employ in ‘Des Cannibales’ preaches a need to become more open-minded towards other cultures. Against the backdrop of religious conflict this literary strategy gains added meaning. Montaigne’s mother Antoinette López de Villanueva was a Marrano (a Jew who had converted to Christianity) while the author himself regularly sought out contact with Protestants, particularly as two of his family members converted

to the religion.<sup>44</sup> It is likely that Montaigne included so many remarks on the importance of judgement in 'Des Cannibales' to encourage a more open-minded approach towards people of other religions. After all, cannibals wait til their victims are dead before eating the remains - the European religious authorities burn their heretics alive, 'le faire rostir par le menu, le faire mordre et meurtrir aux chiens et aux pourceaux' (I.XXXI.209).

Returning to the issue of property law, Bruno is also inspired by the complete lack of legal or commercial framework in the Americas and uses it to criticise how Europeans have attempted to supplant what is natural through colonial conquest. In the third dialogue of *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* Bruno derides the property laws which European invaders have used to divide up the previously-untouched land of the Americas:

Tutti magnificano l'età de l'oro e poi stimano e predicano per virtù quella manigolda che la estinse; quella ch'ha trovato il mio et il tuo: quella ch'ha divisa, e fatta propria a costui e colui non solo la terra (la quale è data a tutti gli animanti suoi), ma et oltre il mare, e forse l'aria ancora. (*Spaccio* II.319)

In the 16th century, the New World was commonly associated with the Golden Age (despite the grislier customs of some of its inhabitants), which was considered to be a period of time when nature remained outside the reaches of humanity.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the New World came to represent a different period of time altogether; in America, nature was still whole, complete, undivided - it had not yet undergone the same destructive transformation between 'mine' and 'yours' as supposedly civilised, developed European society. Bruno contrasts the pure state of this allegorical version of America with the actions of the Europeans and their current desecration of nature - 'la quale è data a tutti gli animanti suoi' - through the introduction of 'leggi usurpative e proprietarie del mio e del tuo' (*Spaccio* II.320). European invaders were beginning to undermine nature's capacity to provide everything for everyone, by imposing their own superficial property laws. In the New World, nature still belongs to nature, although as Bruno notes, it is about to be divided up and changed for a very long time by artificial human laws. Bruno's highly critical response to colonialism arguably reveals a preoccupation with a 'time before' and a 'time after' the imposition of custom in the New World.

The loss of a natural, perfect landscape to artificial common law also recalls the conventional 16th-century notion of custom as second nature and its popular connection

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<sup>44</sup> On Montaigne's family tree, see Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 7-20.

<sup>45</sup> On the Golden Age, see Pietro Martire D'Anghiera, 'Sommario dell'istoria dell'Indie occidentali', in *Navigazioni e viaggi*, vol. 5, ed. by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), pp. 25-205 (p. 55).

to the Fall.<sup>46</sup> The Native Americans are considered to be primitive reflections of the Europeans, whose own tribal origins have long been forgotten. As Bruno emphasises above, custom possesses a higher status in European society, whereas Montaigne believes that the New World cannibals are much closer to their original natural state.<sup>47</sup> Therefore Europeans are also living evidence of the continuing corruption of humanity that began when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Handler has previously suggested an interesting link in the *Essais* between original sin, Native Americans and the gradual erosion of humanity's connection to nature:

Here Montaigne's interpretation of the cannibals recalls the doctrines of original sin and the expulsion from paradise: human beings, originally pure, fell from God's grace, and the development of human civilisation merely perpetuates and intensifies the corruption of humankind wilfully alienated from the divine.<sup>48</sup>

The New World acts a reminder of how European society has evolved; it forces thinkers such as Montaigne to reflect on his or her own identity. European civilisation is supposedly more developed, but if custom is a key marker of this evolution, then it appears to have held humans back in some respects, severing their connection to nature and thus their ability to access the divine knowledge of nature.

All of these images and ideas can be summarised with a final reflection on the trope of poison in both Bruno's Italian dialogues and Montaigne's *Essais*. For example, towards the end of the first dialogue of the *Cena*, Smitho and Teofilo engage in a lengthy conversation which dwells mainly on the power that custom wields in their society. Smitho asks Teofilo whether he is aware of the extent of custom's power to infect people 'da fanciullezza in certe persuasioni, ad impedirne da l'intelligenze de cose manifestissime?' (*Cena* I.464). He explains that custom's authority grows over time without humans even realising:

[...] non altrimenti ch'accader suole a quei che sono avezzati a mangiar veleno, la compulsion de quali al fine non solamente non ne sente oltraggio, ma ancora se l'ha convertito in nutrimento naturale: di sorte che l'antidoto istesso gli è divenuto mortifero. (*Cena* I.464)

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<sup>46</sup> For an interesting discussion of the connection between Montaigne's reflections on clothing and the Fall, see John O'Brien, 'Fashion', in *Montaigne after Theory/Theory after Montaigne* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2011), pp. 55-74 (pp. 57-58). See also George Hoffmann, 'Anatomy of the Mass: Montaigne's "Cannibals"', *PMLA*, 11.2 (2002), pp. 207-221 for a fascinating analysis of Catholic symbolism in 'Des Cannibales'.

<sup>47</sup> Handler has suggested that in the New World inhabitants, 'he [Montaigne] can still see others as exemplars of some pristine and natural, that is, uncultured or uncultured, human reality' (p. 13).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

From birth, custom or *consuetudine* becomes so ingrained over time that human beings are no longer able to remember what it really is - they forget that it is a 'poison' and instead feed on it as if it were real sustenance. Bruno draws on the image of poison again in the *Eroici Furori*; he declares that custom 'è uno de grandissimi e fortissimi inconvenienti che trovar si possano' and explains that 'similmente accade a essi, che come a color che da puerizia e gioventù sono consueti a mangiar veneno, quai son divenuti a tale, che se gli è convertito in suave e proprio nutrimento' (*Furori* II.729). Both here and in another passage from the *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, Bruno attributes the comparison of custom with poison to the Arab polymath Averroes (1126-1198), and uses it to conclude that people who follow custom too deeply come to abhor what is natural or exists 'secondo la comun natura' (*Furori* II.729-730).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, there is no reasonable explanation for why humans follow customary law except that they have done so for a long time and have become dulled to its effects. In a key passage from the *Cena*, Smitho laments to Teofilo: 'Non sai quanta forza abbia la consuetudine di credere, ed esser nodrito da fanciullezza in certe persuasioni, ad impedirne da l'intelligenza de cose manifestissime' (*Cena* I.464).<sup>50</sup> Once more custom is equated to something that is ingested - 'nodrito' - and again the emphasis is on the dangers of this process at work 'da fanciullezza'. An individual repeatedly 'feeds' on custom from a young age which eventually impedes the seeking out of 'cose manifestissime'; instead it encourages an unquestioning acceptance of what has come before, time and again, rather than a meaningful discussion of laws and rites. Therefore custom is rooted not in reason, but in time, and since it often implants itself in the mind from birth, it is very difficult for an individual to question what they have always believed to be right.

The effects of custom are also described as poisonous in the *Essais*. In 'De la Coustume' Montaigne expresses the same concerns as Bruno, drawing on extremely similar imagery. He refers to the ancient King Mithridates of Pontus who, 'par son moyen, renegea son estomac à se nourrir de poison' (I.XXIII.109), using an identical

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<sup>49</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Acrotismo cameracense. Le spiegazioni degli articoli di fisica contro i Peripatetici*, trans. and ed. by Barbara Amato, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 7 (Pisa: Serra, 2009): 'Allo stesso modo, infatti - aggiunge il suo commentatore Averroè - coloro che sono soliti nutrirsi di veleno si dice che siano dotati di una facoltà tale per cui, mentre sono ristorati dal veleno come da un cibo appropriato, risulta per essi fatale, di conseguenza, quanto per gli altri è vitale e funge da medicamento' (p. 46). For analysis of this trope in relation to Averroes, see M.A. Granada, "Esser spogliato dall'umana perfezione e giustizia". Nueva evidencia de la presencia de Averroes en la obra y en el proceso de Giordano Bruno', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 5.2 (1999), pp. 305-331 (pp. 311-314).

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of Averroes' influence on these passages from the *Cena*, see Alfonso Musci, 'L'«antiqua Consuetudine di vivere...». Commento a un luogo machiavelliano dello *Spaccio*', in *Favole, metafore, storie: Seminario su Giordano Bruno*, ed. by Olivia Catanorchi & Diego Pirillo (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2007), pp. 141-156 (pp. 149-150); also Nicola Badaloni, 'Sulla struttura del tempo in Giordano Bruno', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 3.1 (1997), pp. 11-45 (p. 17).



metaphor to Bruno in order to describe the dulling of the senses due to custom. In 'De l'experience' he dwells on additional instances that express both how custom may provoke unsettling behaviour in people and also how this behaviour comes to be tacitly accepted over time. The following passage employs similar metaphors and instances of personal experience in order to explain the relationship between custom, time and human existence:

Mon collet de fleurs sert à mon nez, mais, apres que je m'en suis vestu trois jours de suite, il ne sert qu'aux nez assistants. Cecy est plus estrange, que, nonobstant des longs intervalles et intermissions, l'accoustumance puisse joindre et establir l'effect de son impression sur noz sens: comme essayent les voisins des clochiers. Je loge chez moy en une tour où à la diane et à la retraite, une fort grosse cloche sonne tous les jours l'Ave Maria. Ce tintamarre effraye ma tour mesme: et, aux premiers jours me semblant insupportable, en peu de temps m'apprivoise, de maniere que je l'oy sans offense et souvent sans m'en esveiller. (I.XXIII.109-110)

Interestingly, Montaigne draws the examples above from his own direct experience - he considers himself to be a suitable illustration of the effects of custom just as much as the historical examples he cites. He is aware that his perception of reality is shaped by custom, and uses this awareness to emphasise a wider point on the nature of custom. The examples of the 'collet de fleurs' and the nearby clock tower again express the same ideas as Bruno - namely that time accommodates custom's growing authority to such an extent that its effects on our understanding of the world are slowly mutated over time. Perhaps at first, certain local laws or changes to society were met with disapproval, just as Montaigne was initially irritated by the church bells near his bedroom, but eventually they become a new kind of normal.

Another concrete example of this phenomenon is the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1582, which Montaigne remarks upon at various points throughout the *Essais*. A reform of the earlier Julian calendar, the Gregorian version was designed by its namesake Pope Gregory XIII to keep the vernal equinox on the 21st March and reconcile the Easter calendar with lunar cycles as closely as possible.<sup>51</sup> The most significant alteration involved removing ten days from the Julian calendar. Although it has now been in use for centuries, at the time of its inception, the Gregorian calendar was an important change to 16th-century European society.

However, the change itself was not entirely welcome. In 'De mesnager sa volonté' (III.X), Montaigne confesses that he is struggling to adjust to the new calendar

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<sup>51</sup> For a detailed account of Western computation of time, see Part II 'Our Time: The Imposition of Order' in Anthony Aveni, *Empires of Time - Calendars, Clocks and Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

after switching from the Julian version: ‘l’eclipsment nouveau des dix jours du Pape m’ont prins si bas que je ne m’en puis bonnement accoustrer’ (III.X.1010). This event is an interesting example in which technical time, represented by the correction of the calendar, has a tangible effect upon Montaigne. Gerard T. Moran has previously illustrated how the French rural nobility was often the least receptive to marking time in modern ways.<sup>52</sup> In a fascinating study, Moran demonstrates how traditional feast days were poorly observed during the late 1500s due to the Wars of Religion; rural nobles were often amongst the last to abandon such celebrations. The same may be said for the calendrical reform, since Montaigne initially remarks that the previous way of counting was used for centuries: ‘un si ancien et long usage me vendique et rappelle à soy’ (III.X.1010).<sup>53</sup> However, after a few days - or in the case of the calendrical reform, a few decades - have passed, they eventually cease to be a problem; the introduction of both customary law and the noisy church bells is validated with time.

Indeed, in a typical example of the contradictions inherent in the *Essais*, Montaigne gradually becomes inured to the change in technical time. In ‘Des Boyteux’ (III.XI) he appears to play down its effect on his fellow countrymen and women: ‘Il y a deux ou trois ans qu’on acoursit l’an de dix jours en France. Combien de changemens devoient suyvre cette reformation’ce fut proprement remuer le ciel et la terre à la fois. Ce neantmoins, il n’est rien qui bouge de sa place’ (III.XI.1025).<sup>54</sup> Custom’s ability to endure over time means that humans mistakenly rely on it in order to inform their understanding of reality, even though the actual roots of custom have been long forgotten over the passage of time. In the quotation above, Montaigne illustrates how the initial shock surrounding the upheaval has already begun to wane - in time, the former method of counting time will be forgotten altogether, and this ‘new’ change will become normal. This ability to influence human understanding of reality is a central component of custom’s authority. Custom is powerful because, as Montaigne remarks, ‘c’est à la

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<sup>52</sup> See Gerard T. Moran, ‘Conceptions of Time in Early Modern France: An Approach to the History of Collective Mentalities’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 12.4 (1981), pp. 3-19.

<sup>53</sup> Montaigne also briefly mentions the calendrical reform in the opening lines of ‘Des Boyteux’ (III.XI): ‘Ce neantmoins, il n’est rien qui bouge de sa place: mes voisins trouvent l’heure de leurs semences, de leur recolte, l’opportunité de leurs negoces, les jours nuisibles et propices, au mesme point justement où ils les avoyent assignez de tout temps. Ny l’erreur ne se sentoît en nostre usage, ny l’amendement ne s’y sent’ (III.XI.1025-1026).

<sup>54</sup> Montaigne adds another element of time to this discussion, demonstrating that the seasons do not change despite the change to the calendar. Thus a contrast arises between technical time and natural time: ‘Il y a deux ou trois ans qu’on acoursit l’an de dix jours en France. Combien de changemens devoient suyvre cette reformation’ce fut proprement remuer le ciel et la terre à la fois. Ce neantmoins, il n’est rien qui bouge de sa place: mes voisins trouvent l’heure de leurs semences, de leur recolte, l’opportunité de leurs negoces, les jours nuisibles et propices, au mesme point justement où ils les avoyent assignez de tout temps. Ny l’erreur ne se sentoît en nostre usage, ny l’amendement ne s’y sent’ (III.XI.1025-1026).

coustume de donner forme à nostre vie, telle qu'il lui plaist; elle peut tout en cela: c'est le breuvage de Circé' (III.XIII.1080). In Homer's *Odyssey* the goddess Circe's potions turn Odysseus' men into animals - Montaigne employs the image here in order to emphasise that custom makes human beings forgetful of their former selves and their true form.<sup>55</sup>

### *Custom, time and truth*

The poisonous portrayal of custom seeks to define it as something that pretends to nourish while gradually infecting an individual's behaviour; it mirrors natural feeding habits until it comes to be accepted, strengthening its hold by dulling the senses until its venomous nature is forgotten. However, in comparison to their contemporaries in the legal sphere and theologians concerned with the corruption of humankind, Montaigne and Bruno were particularly interested in how custom affected their use of time. Rather than acknowledging the role of custom in shaping collective identity in a positive manner, i.e. as a potential symbol of pride in age-old traditions, both thinkers were continually frustrated by custom since they believed that it encouraged a passive mindset to embed itself within a given society. In Chapter Three I described the epistemological initiative which grew from a desire to put philosophy to practical use. However, custom appears to discourage this kind of activity and as a result, both Montaigne and Bruno constantly lament the manner in which custom's authority over time encourages the passive acceptance of knowledge in wider society. His remarks in 'De la Coustume' on the passive, unquestioning mindset that custom breeds may help to explain this unwelcome effect of custom in more detail:

Mais le principal effect de sa puissance, c'est de nous saisir et empieter de telle sorte, qu'à peine soit-il en nous de nous r'avoir de sa prinse et de r'entrer en nous, pour discourir et raisonner de ses ordonnances. De vray, parce que nous les humons avec le laict de nostre naissance, et que le visage du monde se presente en cet estat à nostre premiere veue, il semble que nous soyons nais à la condition de suyvre ce train. (I.XXIII.115-116)

Montaigne is concerned that if certain ways and practices are instilled into us from birth - 'nous les humons avec le laict de nostre naissance' - then what would be the motivation to question them? This aspect of custom continues the earlier discussion I highlighted concerning the relationship between artifice and nature; it is easy to accept

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<sup>55</sup> For more on the figure of Circe see Pierre Grimal, *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine*, 15 edn (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2015).

customs as natural and normal when one has grown up adhering to them. Humans are more prepared to accept customary laws and practices without question, particularly when ‘nous soyons nés à la condition de suivre ce train’; in the ‘Apologie de Raimond Sebond’ (II.XII) such practices may be fuelled by ‘la coutume de leur pays, ou par l’institution des parents’ (II.XII.504). A rather more violent example from ‘De la coutume’ further emphasises the manner in which customary laws may firmly cement their authority as several generations of human beings come and go:

Celuy qu’on rencontra battant son pere, respondit que c’estoit la coutume de sa maison: que son pere avoit ainsi batu son ayeul; son ayeul, son bisayeul; et, montrant son fils: Et cettuy-cy me battra quand il sera venu au terme de l’age où je suis. (I.XXIII.115)

Here the actual action of beating one’s father is futile and cruel, but the men in question do not view it in such a way because ‘la coutume de sa maison’ predates them all and will outlast all of them too, which appears to be the sole (yet acceptable) justification to this custom.<sup>56</sup> This passive acceptance of certain customary behaviour in society leads most humans to understand the world in a way which has been altered by the superficialities of customary practices. ‘Chacun en fait ainsi, d’autant que l’usage nous desrobe le vray visage des choses’ (I.XXIII.116). As Margaret McGowan has suggested, Montaigne employs anecdotes such as the one above in order to disturb received opinion.<sup>57</sup> Custom alters the true nature of the world due to its persistence. It presents an individual with an idea of right and wrong as soon as that person enters the world, and as we have seen, what makes this all the more disturbing is the manner in which custom derives its authority from time, not reason.

Naturally this clashes decisively with the spirit of questioning and understanding that is to be consistently found in the *Essais*, a characteristic that forms part of Montaigne’s commitment to seeking truth over time. Instead customs are often accepted without due analysis or nuanced discussion; they are instilled into a person ‘sans jugement et sans choix, voire le plus souvent avant l’âge de discretion’ (II.XII.504). Interestingly, Bruno expresses exactly the same concerns as Montaigne with regard to the idea that custom influences an individual from the moment they are born. Towards the end of the

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<sup>56</sup> In another example regarding ancient bathing rituals, Montaigne describes custom’s duration as something that overshadows the lifetime of human beings: ‘mais depuis, et d’une coutume qui a duré plusieurs siècles et en la plus part des nations du monde, ils se lavoyent tous nuds d’eau mixtionnée et parfumée, de manière qu’ils employoient pour tesmoignage de grande simplicité de se laver d’eau simple’ (p. 297).

<sup>57</sup> Margaret McGowan, ‘The Art of Transition in the *Essais*’, in *Montaigne: Essays in Memory of Richard Sayce*, ed. by I.D. McFarlane & Ian Maclean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 38.

first dialogue of the *Cena*, after Teofilo has repeatedly announced the imminent arrival of the Nolan and his philosophy, his companion Smitho raises some concerns about how Teofilo can be sure that the Nolan's theories are indeed the 'right' philosophy to follow.<sup>58</sup> He asks this because he is all too aware of the power that custom wields, and how it is passed down over time:

Vedo bene, che tutti nascemo ignoranti, credemo facilmente d'essere ignoranti; crescemo, e siamo allevati co' la disciplina e consuetudine di nostra casa, e non meno noi udiamo biasimare le leggi, gli riti, le fede e gli costumi de nostri adversari ed alieni da noi, che quelli di noi e di cose nostre. (*Cena* I.464)

Smitho accepts that humans are born into the world without any knowledge of anything - 'tutti nascemo ignoranti' - but this state of unknowing can quickly be supplanted by custom. According to Smitho, one is merely born into the customs and traditions of their own house, and raised to believe that they are correct, for no other reason than they are the customs of that particular house. Smitho's concerns are also illustrated by Montaigne in 'Des Cannibales'; the thinker is discussing the manner in which Native Americans are judged as barbaric simply because they follow different customs:

Or, je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage; comme de vray il semble que nous n'avons autre mire de la verité et de la raison que l'exemple et idée des opinions et usances du païs où nous sommes. (I.XXXI.205)

Like the fictional Smitho, Montaigne also emphasises that as human beings we are always bound to the reason which springs forth from the 'opinions et usances du païs où nous sommes'. Thus we are raised to believe that anything which does not follow our own traditions is wrong and barbaric: 'chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage.' In this chapter Montaigne was very concerned with the manner in which judgement is affected by custom, and it appears that often our understanding of peoples different to our own is heavily clouded by the uses and customs we have been raised in from birth.

Furthermore, in 'Du pedantisme' (I.XXV), Montaigne alludes to how exactly this process may be further instilled in an individual through childhood education. The

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<sup>58</sup> Koderá throws light on why Smitho raises these concerns in the text: '[Bruno] recounts the story that in his younger years, the Copernican theory really 'shook his mind', because back then his entire intellectual life was imbued with the old ways of thinking and a corresponding regimen of the body he now regards as erroneous and obsolete' (p. 239). His own education meant he was constantly aware of these doctrines and their implications for daily practice.

Spartan method of learning encouraged students to think carefully about historical or philosophical examples and how one might practically put them to use. Montaigne compares this system to the teaching methods of the pedant, which rely on hearsay (*ouïr dire*) and ‘preceptes et parolles’ (I.XXV.142). Unlike Spartan society, with its emphasis on engraining works (and the action one might derive from them) into the very soul of a student, the pedant passes information down to children from a young age without encouraging any form of inquiry. Since custom’s authority grows over time, customs and teachings are only strengthened in the mind of an individual and they are accepted without question. Thus, according to the first two dialogues of the *Cena* it becomes acceptable for groups such as the English university professors to judge others - in this case the Nolan and his philosophy - as enemies or somehow abnormal on the basis that they do not conform to the same customs.

Indeed, in both the Italian dialogues and the *Essais* one particularly significant issue that supposedly characterises ‘the masses’ of the late 16th century is their willingness to allow custom to dictate their lives. Bruno criticises the entrenched ways of thinking that arise from this kind of behaviour. His dissatisfaction with Scholasticism stems from his belief that he is fighting against what has been considered for centuries to be the only acceptable cosmos: the finite cosmos.<sup>59</sup> Bruno portrayed the majority of university scholars as perpetuating certain philosophical ideas simply because they had existed for centuries: ‘For Bruno, the passive reception of truths...is the distinctive mark of asses’.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, as I suggested in the previous section, the causes of custom are often unknown, and yet they are accepted unquestioningly. Consequently, anyone who doesn’t accept this bizarre form of authority is ‘hors des gonds de raison’; as a thinker who declares himself open minded and willing to suspend judgement, this is a significant problem.<sup>61</sup>

Clearly both Montaigne and Bruno were open to exploring ideas that did not conform to the *status quo*, which not only clashed with the enduring nature of custom but also its propensity - particularly in its context as common law - to create divisions between different groups of people. In ‘Du Jeune Caton’ (I.XXXVII), a chapter which is

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<sup>59</sup> See Védrine for more on the link between Bruno and Aristotelianism: ‘Comme le proclame le titre du *De Immenso* l’univers est devenu “infigurable” car l’infini échappe, par principe, à toute détermination spatiale, géométrique ou physique’ (p. 129).

<sup>60</sup> Kodera, p. 246. See also Musci, ‘L’«antiqua Consuetudine di vivere...». Commento a un luogo machiavelliano dello *Spaccio*’, pp. 141-156. Musci’s study focuses on custom in the *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. And yet, Montaigne openly accepted the *status quo*, despite his many reservations about the power of custom; the essayist errs on the side of conservatism when faced with the common 16th-century debate between law and custom.

devoted in large part to discussing the effects of custom, Montaigne emphasises his willingness to suspend his judgement in order to look past difference and instead try to understand it. In the opening lines he states: 'Je n'ay point cette erreur commune de juger d'un autre selon que je suis. J'en croy aysément des choses diverses à moy' (I.XXXVII.229). Unfortunately, custom reduces difference to sameness - it perpetuates the same laws and maintains the same behaviour until there is no room for difference to operate. This is a vitally important point in the *Essais*. Once custom has been ingrained in society over time, then it naturally forces people to become suspicious of newness, novelty or *novità*.

This problem takes on a further significance when we consider the important contextual events that were revealing *choses diverses* to Montaigne and his own society. For example, arguably such a mindset would not be well-suited to understanding the seemingly savage nature of the newly-discovered Native American tribes. At the start of 'Du Jeune Caton' Montaigne discusses his attempts to understand a given topic:

Pour me sentir engagé à une forme, je n'y oblige pas le monde, comme chascun fait; et croy, et conçois mille contraires façons de vie; et, au rebours du commun, reçois plus facilement la difference que la ressemblance en nous. (I.XXXVII.229)

According to this quotation, Montaigne sees the opportunity to embrace things different from his own contextual *milieu* as a positive thing; he is able to profit from the changes he observes around him by opening up thousands of new avenues of thought. This is clear from the expression 'au rebours du commun' which indicates his willingness to move against the standard view and investigate difference rather than sameness. There is also a marked difference between the 'moy' of Montaigne, and 'chascun', 'le commun' - other people in society. As we will see in more detail below, custom is regularly used by Bruno - and to a lesser extent Montaigne - in order to tarnish the intellectual capacity of the 'masses'. Montaigne believes here that what he is doing is different to other people, and embracing *la difference* in others is arguably at the heart of his work. While it is true that 'l'assuefaction endort la vue de nostre jugement' (I.XXIII.112) - *assuefaction* derives from the Latin *assuefacio* i.e. 'to accustom to, to habituate' - Montaigne proudly states that he is able to look past his first impressions: 'Je m'insinue, par imagination, fort bien en leur place' (I.XXXVII.229). This is another vital aspect of his intellectual endeavour - the desire to look at the extreme and curious without prejudice, whereas custom is an entity which complicates this process.

In the *Essais* Montaigne applies this reasoning to the New World again. At the start of this chapter I emphasised that custom was responsible for normalising absurd or

questionable behaviour. On the other hand, Montaigne also recognises that when an individual is bound to the customs of their region - however strange they may be - anyone who does *not* follow them appears equally bizarre or unusual to that particular individual. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in 'Des Cannibales'. Montaigne brings forth a number of themes in the opening lines of this chapter by first drawing on a quote from Pyrrhus - a Greek general and statesman - which discusses the nature of the Roman army: 'Je ne sçay, dit-il, quels barbares sont ceux-ci (car les Grecs appelloient ainsi toutes les nations estrangieres), mais la disposition de cette armée que je voy, n'est aucunement barbare' (I.XXXI.202). Language, judgement, the artifice of war, secondhand experience vs. direct experience - all of these things are explored in 'Des Cannibales'. However, arguably the word *barbare* takes centre stage, and Montaigne is careful to remind us that the Greeks described *all* foreign nations as 'barbaric', a term which in this case appears to signify 'different to themselves'. A large section of 'Des Cannibales' is taken up with listing various New World customs which 16th century European readers would have presumably described as 'barbaric' - soothsayers are killed if they don't provide accurate predictions; tribespeople generally walk around naked and of course, the Native Americans occasionally engage in cannibalism.

However, at the end of the chapter, readers are treated to the perspective of three Native Americans who journeyed to France and saw firsthand the workings of French society. Rather than acting as though they are in awe of this seemingly civilised society, Montaigne reveals that they held some very valid concerns about French custom:

Ils dirent qu'ils trouvoient en premier lieu fort estrange que tant de grands hommes, portans barbe, forts et armez, qui estoient autour du Roy (il est vraysemblable que ils parloient des Suisses de sa garde), se soubmissent à obeyr à un enfant, et qu'on ne choissoit plus tost quelqu'un d'entr'eux pour commander; secondement (ils ont une façon de leur langage telle, qu'ils nomment les hommes moitié les uns des autres) qu'ils avoyent aperçu qu'il y avoit parmy nous des hommes pleins et gorgez de toutes sortes de commoditez, et que leurs moitez estoient mendiens à leurs portes, décharnez de faim et de pauvreté; et trouvoient estrange comme ces moitez icy necessiteuses pouvoient souffrir une telle injustice, qu'ils ne prissent les autres à la gorge, ou missent le feu à leurs maisons. (I.XXXI. 213-214)

By including the perspective of the Native American visitors, Montaigne's literary device reflects the 'otherness' and 'strangeness' of the New World tribes back onto his own society. In doing so, he demonstrates how the French appear foreign and barbaric in the eyes of the Native Americans, because they follow customs which are completely alien to the visitors. In 'De la coustume' Montaigne frequently dwells on the exotic customs of



the Native Americans; for example the Europeans have found tribes of people who eat ‘sauterelles, formiz, laizards, chauvessouriz...ils les cuisent et apprestent à diverses sauces’ (I.XXIII.109). Montaigne then preempts the reactions of his Western readers to this ‘strange’ behaviour by reminding them of another characteristic of custom: ‘Ces exemples estrangers ne sont pas estranges, si nous considerons, ce que nous essayons ordinairement, combien l’accoustumance hebeate nos sens’ (I.XXIII.109). Because of this process ‘over time’, humans become much less aware of how strange their behaviour may seem to outsiders and thus more accepting of its normality. At the same time, as our senses and judgement become gradually more dulled, the behaviour of people from different cultures appears more and more unusual:

Revenons à l’empire de la coustume. Les peuples nourris à la liberté et à se commander eux mesmes, estiment toute autre forme de police monstrueuse et contre nature. Ceux qui sont duits à la monarchie en font de mesme. (I.XXIII.116)

People who have grown accustomed to ruling themselves consider any other form of government ‘monstrueuse et contre nature’. However, customs such as these vary from place to place (some societies may be ruled by a single monarch), and are capable of harnessing a large degree of influence over different groups of people. Consequently, the customs of other groups outside a particular cultural milieu will naturally be viewed with suspicion. At times, Montaigne appears to embrace this mindset himself, lulling his readers into a false sense of security by describing how ‘odd’ he considers the customs of foreign - particularly non-European - cultures to be; in ‘De la coustume’ he spends almost two pages listing the strangest customs he has encountered. There are ‘nations entieres, où non seulement la mort estoit mesprisée, mais festoyée’ (I.XXIII.115), and societies in which ‘on peut honnestement faire des enfans à sa mère, les peres se mesler à leur filles, et à leur fils’ (I.XXIII.114). In fact, this incessant listing of examples is a literary trap. The customs of 16th-century France may easily be considered just as strange from an outsider’s perspective, only his readers have been numbed to their true nature over time: ‘Les barbares ne nous sont de rien plus merueilleux, que nous sommes à eux’ (I.XXIII.112). Montaigne further emphasises this point with the story of a man who refuses to use toilet paper in favour of his own hand. This fairly disgusting example is followed by a humorously wry thought from Montaigne:

Je trouvai qu’il ne parloit pas du tout sans raison: et m’avoit la coustume osté l’appercevance de cette estrangeté, laquelle pourtant nous trouvons si hideuse, quand elle est recitée d’un autre país. Les miracles sont selon l’ignorance en quoy

nous sommes de la nature. L'assuefaction endort la vue de nostre jugement.  
(I.XXIII.112)

Using an anecdote that compares how different cultures go to the toilet, Montaigne employs humour again in order to highlight the close-mindedness that custom breeds in his own society. Strangeness or otherness is entirely subjective and depends on the perspective of the observer which - more often than not - has been greatly influenced by custom.<sup>62</sup> Anthony Grafton has previously described how the ancient Greek historian Herodotus provided a model 'for detailed, vivid descriptions of the origins, institutions, and manners of unfamiliar peoples' such as the native American tribes.<sup>63</sup> Montaigne's own listing of exotic customs leads to a common dilemma for early modern thinkers; namely that 'the proliferation of opposites in custom and belief made plain that no civilisation could claim universal validity'.<sup>64</sup> All of these ideas are neatly summarised with a brief but damning remark towards the middle of the chapter: 'Par où il advient que ce qui est hors des gonds de coustume, on le croid hors des gonds de raison' (I.XXIII.116). That which does not adhere to custom does not adhere to reason in the minds of most people, since they often conflate the two - Montaigne's own readers included.<sup>65</sup> Yet the author of the *Essais* considers this to be a dubious way to view the world and uses his writing to play with the preconceptions of his audience in order to try and convince them otherwise. In a similar manner to his concerns regarding the proliferation of philosophies over time, and the unwieldy impermanence that humans exist within anyway, he asks how human beings can truly know what is correct and true about the world when even something like custom, which may endure for much longer

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<sup>62</sup> Montaigne implicitly conveys a similar message in his famous chapter 'Des Cannibales' (I.XXXI). See Luciana Stegagno Picchio, 'The Portuguese, Montaigne and the Cannibals of Brazil: The Problem of the "Other"', *Portuguese Studies*, 6 (1990), pp. 71-84. For example, Picchio states that Montaigne was perfectly aware of the bias inherent in the sources he relied on to inform himself about the New World in 'Des Cannibales': 'Montaigne was fully aware of the fact that all the reports reaching Europe on new anthropophagy bore the stamp of clichés [...], these time-honoured motifs had been applied to the new environment and human situation by observers (beginning with Columbus) who were so embedded in their own culture that they were unable to report impartially what their eyes had seen' (p. 75).

<sup>63</sup> Grafton, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Here Montaigne is discussing custom's ability to effectively imitate human reason; 'hors des gonds de raison' refers to actions which contradict rational human behaviour. One must always be careful when analysing the word 'reason' in the *Essais* as its meaning has been known to change from chapter to chapter. Reason generally refers to a human function necessary for all forms of knowing (e.g. logic, debate). However, rather than linking reason to truth (which is unwavering), in the *Essais* Montaigne tends to align reason with opinion and emphasises that reason itself may change over time: '[les hommes] ont sophistiqué [la raison] de tant d'argumentations et de discours appelez de dehors, qu'elle est devenue variable et particuliere à chacun, et a perdu son propre visage, constant et naturel' (III.XII.1049-50). For an introduction to the nature of reason in the *Essais*, see Ann Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 144-147; Paul Mathias, 'Raison' in *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: H. Champion, 2004); also Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, pp. 74-75.

periods of time, provokes such nonsensical behaviour and gradually conceals the folly of our own uses and tradition. If he believes that one must look inwardly in order to 'se cognoistre' then it is vitally important to understand the effects of custom on one's judgement and behaviour.

Of course, Bruno has a very specific reason to be concerned about the suspicions that arise from new ways of seeing the world. The authority of Aristotelianism and its finite cosmos, together with the prominence of the Ptolemaic solar system in intellectual circles and wider society, is presented as the old way of thought that Bruno's theories will be pitted against. Although Bruno considers scholars who uphold these ancient views to be wrong, unfortunately 'son creduti e (quel ch'è peggio) si credeno, dotti e dottori' (*Cena* I.458). Nevertheless, Teofilo begins to extol the virtues of il Nolano while criticising these supposed learned people who 'vogliono ostinatamente perseverare ne le tenebre' (*Cena* I.458) of geocentric thought, of a cosmos without infinite worlds. Like Montaigne, Bruno preempts the response of his audience, but does so by inserting Prudenizio into the discussion as a literary stone wall who refuses to accept the idea of something new, potentially mirroring the reactions of his more conservative 16th-century readers. After Teofilo expresses his frustration at the devotion of those who wish to 'perseverare ne le tenebre' of 'acceptable' Aristotelianism, Prudenizio simply states: 'Sii come la si vuole, io non voglio discostarmi dal parer de gli antichi, per che dice il saggio: «Ne l'antiquità è la sapienza»' (*Cena* I.459). Teofilo tries again to persuade him that one should make an effort to learn from the mistakes of others in society, as Copernicus has done, 'quasi a' nostri tempi appresso la medesima anni mille ottocento quarantanove' (*Cena* I.460). Prudenizio responds thus:

Dite quel che vi piace, tiratela a vostro bel piacer dove vi pare, io sono amico de l'antiquità; e quanto appartiene a le vostre opinioni o paradossi, non credo che sì molti e sì saggi sien stati ignoranti come pensate voi et altri amici di novità. (*Cena* I.460)

He solidly refuses to extricate himself from centuries of traditional thought, and specifically states at the end that he is suspicious of any 'amici di novità' such as the mysterious Nolan. Newness is undesirable - Prudenizio is not interested in any philosophy that does not conform to *l'antiquità* (and more specifically the philosophy of Aristotle and his followers). In 'Du pedantisme', Montaigne refers to the kind of 'knowledge' that Prudenizio purports to possess as a form of 'sçavoir pedantesque' - while Prudenizio may well possess knowledge of ancient thinkers, their words have done little to improve his own critical thinking and willingness to embrace new ideas. Montaigne recalls a

Perigordin phrase for such a pedant: ‘Mon vulgaire Perigordin appelle fort plaisamment “lettreferits” ces sçavanteaux...ausquels les lettres ont donné un coup de marteau’ (I.XXV.139). In other words, knowledge of ancient sources has been stamped onto them like a hammer but their own understanding has not evolved in the slightest - like Prudenizio and his oafish behaviour, ‘le plus souvent ils semblent estre ravalez, mesmes du sens commun’ (I.XXV.139). The author briefly asks whether his own tendency to quote or paraphrase the words of others is symptomatic of the same kind of behaviour: ‘Je m’en vay, escorniflant par cy par là des livres les sentences qui me plaisent’ (I.XXV.136). However, Montaigne suggests throughout this chapter that pedants receive the words and teachings of others without these quotations elevating their own mind to a higher level, they fail to develop a spirit that is ‘plus vive et plus esveillée’ (I.XXV.133) in the process.

Smitho’s behaviour is later compared with that of Prudenizio, perhaps reflecting Bruno’s ideal reader. We have seen that Smitho is actively concerned about the effect of custom on his idea of right and wrong, and shows the same awareness as Montaigne in ‘De la Coustume’ concerning the manner in which custom can prevail over someone from birth. Smitho is aware that he might be guilty of prejudging the customs and rites of those ‘alieni da noi’. When faced with difference, Bruno chooses not to reject it immediately like Prudenizio but instead to wonder how we know what is truly right and wrong, in much the same way as Montaigne. This dilemma is reflected in Smitho’s question to Teofilo, ‘come io, che non so nulla, potrò conoscere la differenza de dignità ed indignità...’ (*Cena* I. 462). There are so many different ways of doing and thinking, how does Smitho know which one is ‘right’? Here Bruno clearly pits the stubborn response to *novità* of Prudenizio against the thoughtful discussion led by Smitho, presenting his reader with two possible reactions to the radical theories that he is about to expound.

Indeed, the very nature of the theories Bruno will present in the *Cena* are bound to shatter rigid preconceptions of the world. In the first dialogue of the *Cena* he laments that the explorers have been given credit for finding a new ‘world’ (and then mindlessly destroying it), whereas Bruno has in fact discovered a new universe. After describing the despicable actions of Columbus and his colonial successors, the main interlocutor Teofilo portrays ‘il Nolano’ (Bruno’s literary alter-ego) as someone who has discovered truth beyond even the stars themselves:

Or ecco quello [il Nolano] ch’ha varcato l’aria, penetrato il cielo, discorse le stelle, trapassati gli margini del mondo, fatte svanir le fantastiche muraglia de le prime, ottave, none decime, et altre che si s’avesser potute aggiungere sfere per relazione de vani matematici e cieco veder di filosofi volgari. (*Cena* I.454)

Of course, this rhetoric may seem fairly exaggerated to modern readers, since Bruno appears to be fashioning himself as a prophet or god-like figure who has been sent to mankind in order to free them from the shackles of pedantry. Sergius Koderá has already examined the true purpose behind what he terms Bruno's 'literary self-fashioning' and in fact, these bombastic descriptions are partially used as another means of situating Brunian philosophy within the cosmological innovations already begun by Copernicus.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in the late 16th century Bruno was attacking centuries of thought which had held the universe to be finite, with the Earth in the centre of the planets, not the sun. The 'vani matematici' he consistently refers to are thinkers who have blindly accepted the Ptolemaic system for centuries.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, he continually emphasises in the *Cena* the groundbreaking nature of his theories through a notable use of bombast and exaggerated rhetoric. Like Montaigne, he is very aware that what he is trying to do in his writing is different from that of other people:

Al che rispose il Nolano, che lui non vedea per gli occhi di Copernico, né di Ptolomeo, ma per i proprii quanto al giudizio e la determinazione; benché quanto alle osservazioni, stima dover molto a questi ed altri solleciti matematici, che successivamente, a tempi e tempi, giongendo lume a lume, ne han donati principii sufficienti, per i quali siamo ridotti a tal giudizio, quale non possea se non dopo molte non ociose etadi esser parturito. (*Cena* I.447)

Here Bruno accepts that he is indebted to the theories put forward by previous philosophies to a certain degree. But more importantly than this, he does not accept them as absolutely correct and instead has made his own considerations on the nature of the universe, which are different even to Copernicus, and certainly radically opposed to those of Ptolemy. First, Bruno carefully describes his own place in intellectual history as someone who is unafraid to break the *status quo* or 'molto non ociose etadi', even going further than Copernicus, an astronomer he clearly admires. He emphasises the unique nature of his writing in a similar way to Montaigne, pitting 'il Nolano', the one true bringer of this new philosophy, and comparing him to the masses. Teofilo states that 'un solo, benché solo, può e potrà vincere, et al fine avrà vinto e triomfarà contra l'ignoranza generale' (*Cena* I.456). Dario Tessicini describes this inflated rhetoric, of which there are several examples in the *Cena*, as Bruno's 'glorification of the Nolan philosophy, entrusted

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<sup>66</sup> Sergius Koderá, 'Timid Mathematicians vs. Daring Explorers of the Infinite Cosmos: Giordano Bruno, Literary Self-Fashioning and *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*', in *The Making of Copernicus: Early Modern Transformations of the Scientist and his Science*, ed. by Wolfgang Neuber, Thomas Rahn & Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>67</sup> See Dario Tessicini, *I dintorni dell'infinito: Giordano Bruno e l'astronomia del cinquecento* (Pisa: F. Serra, 2007) for a much more detailed description of this historical background and corresponding bibliography.

with a salvific mission to restore truth against the errors of the Aristotelians'.<sup>68</sup> Bruno is keen to distance himself from the *ignoranza generale* of the rest of society, which he feels is caused in no large part by the widespread dissemination of Aristotelianism. Instead he uses dramatic rhetoric to herald himself as someone willing to break with stagnant intellectual thought.

Bruno also emphasises that just because something is old and has been accepted for centuries, this does not automatically mean it holds great value. 'Bene, maestro Prudenzio; si questa volgare e vostra opinione per tanto è vera in quanto che è antica, certo era falsa quando la fu nova' (*Cena* I.460). Philosophies will always come and go - Bruno criticises the notion of newer schools of thought automatically being labelled as wrong within the framework of the cyclical 'ruota del tempo', since all philosophies were 'new' once. Referring to Aristotelianism, Bruno states that 'prima che fusse questa filosofia conforme al vostro cervello, fu quella degli caldei, egizii, maghi, orfici, pitagorici ed altri di prima memoria, conforme al nostro capo' (*Cena* I.460). Bruno justifies his well-documented interest in the pre-Socratics and other earlier currents of thought while simultaneously attacking custom's tendency to reject what is supposedly 'nova' and therefore 'falsa'.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, it must be briefly noted that alongside the pursuit of these philosophical aims, Bruno represents custom as being directly responsible for wasting valuable time. As suggested above, custom often erects unnecessary and yet powerful barriers to seeking true knowledge of nature, and adhering to it is not a productive use of time if it generates only the bizarre or unnatural. In this respect, custom proves to be a grave concern for Bruno, and in the *Cena de le ceneri* he states that due to the power of custom over time, the human ability to understand 'cose manifestissime' is impeded. For example, in the *Cena*, the mere fact that the Oxford scholars 'parlavan ben latino' is seemingly unimportant to Bruno. In a text written in Italian vernacular, Prudenzio's Latin interjections interrupt and slow down the conversation frequently, a literary technique which is continually played out by Bruno throughout the dialogue. Only a few pages later, the pedant Prudenzio is guilty of rambling incorrectly about the origins of the word *tetralogo*. Both Teofilo and Smitho chide his idiotic digressions impatiently: 'Di grazia,

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<sup>68</sup> Dario Tessicini, 'Giordano Bruno on Copernican Harmony, Circular Uniformity and Spiral Motions', in *Unifying Heaven and Earth: Essays in the History of Early Modern Cosmology*, ed. by Miguel A. Granada, Patrick J. Boner & Dario Tessicini (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2016), p. 121.

<sup>69</sup> See Iliana Klutstein, *Marsilio Ficino et la théologie ancienne: Oracles Chaldaïques, Hymnes Orphiques, Hymnes de Proclus* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1987); also Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964).

signor maestro, lasciamo questi rigori di gramatica' (*Cena* I.445). Prudenizio is adamant that they must know the proper derivation of this word in order to continue the discussion, but Teofilo chides him once again:

Voi, messer Prudenizio, sete troppo prudente. Lasciamo, vi priego, questi discorsi grammaticali; e fate conto, che questo nostro ragionamento sia un dialogo, atteso che benché siamo quattro in persona, saremo dui in officio di proponere e rispondere, di ragionare e ascoltare. (*Cena* I.445-446)

Smitho and Teofilo are eager to begin talking about the Nolan philosophy. But they are continually interrupted by the vacuous observations of Prudenizio, a symbol of the useless nature of pedantry. Furthermore, Prudenizio represents the usage of 16th-century educational institutions that normally insisted on communication entirely in Latin.<sup>70</sup> Instead of being able to reason and listen to one another in Bruno's Italian, Prudenizio's Latin interruptions purposely slow down the dialogical flow of conversation between Teofilo and Smitho. Bruno's choice of language shows how adhering to custom by insisting on speaking in Latin 'betrays' the other interlocutors, literally slowing down their learned discussion and wasting time. Teofilo and Smitho are eager to reason about the nature of il Nolano's new cosmology, while Prudenizio believes he is teaching them when in actual fact he is spouting nonsense and thus wasting time. Again the humorous descriptions of the Oxford professors, coupled with Prudenizio's time-wasting, actually point to a deeper criticism of the effects of custom. The inspiring and energetic use of time introduced towards the end of Chapter Three is immediately dulled when custom and proper usage rears its head.

Thus far I have traced the deep concerns about custom that appear to run consistently through out both the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues. Alongside this criticism, it is important to note that Montaigne and Bruno often portray custom as something that affects other people in society, rather than themselves. It appears that most individuals would not be able to reach such conclusions about the timely, fragile authority of custom and the subsequent dangers that this type of authority poses. Admittedly, Montaigne tends to vary in this respect. In examples we have already seen in this chapter, his use of pronouns fluctuates between using a marked 'je' versus 'eux', and a more inclusive 'nous' in his discussions on custom. Furthermore, in 'De la coustume' (I.XXXVII) he emphasises his willingness to try and shed any prejudices he may hold and put himself in the shoes of other cultures. He offers various apologies for

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<sup>70</sup> For more on the traditions surrounding early modern universities see Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, M.D.: John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

some of the more stranger customs in France with a series of rhetorical questions and answers. First Montaigne remarks on ‘un petit homme natif de Nantes, né sans bras, qui a si bien façonné ses pieds au service que luy devoient les mains, qu’ils en ont à la verité à demy oublié leur office naturel’ (I.XXXVII.III). Rather than recoiling at this example, he asks ‘y a il opinion si bizarre [...] mais d’autres opinions y en a il de si estranges, qu’elle n’aye planté et estably par loix és regions que bon luy a semblé?’ (I.XXXVII.III). He quickly reinforces this view with another remark in much the same vein: ‘J’estime qu’il ne tombe en l’imagination humaine aucune fantasie si forcenée, qui ne rencontre l’exemple de quelque usage public, et par consequent que nostre discours n’estaie et ne fonde’ (I.XXXVII.III).

On the other hand, Bruno is much more consistent in his overt criticism of the mentality that he believes grips those around him. For example, one of the reasons as to why he holds Copernicus in such high regard is his admiration of the astronomer’s rare ability to cast aside the opinions of the so-called stupid masses:

Con tutto ciò chi potrà a pieno lodar la magnanimità di questo germano, il quale avendo poco riguardo a la stolta moltitudine, è stato sì saldo contra il torrente de la contraria fede? (*Cena* I.449)

In this case the ‘stolta moltitudine’ is referred to in such a way because it continues to believe faithfully in the idea that the Earth is in the middle of the solar system.<sup>71</sup> In the wake of the publication of the *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543), a text which Bruno is often guilty of manipulating for his own purposes, Bruno presents Copernicus as purposely ignoring the beliefs of wider society, an attitude which allowed him greater freedom to pursue his new cosmology.<sup>72</sup> Consequently much of the first dialogue of the *Cena de le Ceneri* is devoted to narrating how Bruno has also managed to do this, and how he has even exceeded Copernicus’ work by proving that the universe is infinite. Such criticism of the rest of society plays into the wider narrative that Bruno is a lone intellectual warrior. The last few exchanges between Smitho and Teofilo cement this idea at the end of the first dialogue, in which Teofilo states that truly wise men are few and

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<sup>71</sup> See Bruno, *Opere Latine*, ‘Capitolo XV - Conclusion per cui anche il senso è turbato dall’abitudine a credere il falso’. Bruno once more goes on the attack, blaming the masses for adhering to custom in the mistaken belief that it represents nature - ‘battano alle porte della ragione con amichevole tocco e chiamino con la voce della natura, non per questo esso ha raggiunto la sapienza’ (p. 135).

<sup>72</sup> This stance was famously tempered by Osiander’s preface to the work (which was added to the text after Copernicus’ death), claiming that the heliocentric universe was just a hypothesis and nothing more. On the relationship between Osiander and Copernicus see Michel-Pierre Lerner, ‘Aux origines de la polémique anticopernicienne (II): Luther, Andreas Osiander et Philippe Melanchthon’, *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 90.3 (2006), pp. 409-452 (pp. 424-432).



far between: '[...] per questo gli uomini savii e divini son assai pochi: e la volontà di dèi è questa, atteso che non è stimato né prezioso quel tanto ch'è comone e generale (*Cena* I. 465) To this general idea, Teofilo adds that in order to find truth one must purposefully extricate oneself from the way that the masses think: 'è più sicuro cercar il vero e conveniente fuor de la moltitudine: perché questa mai apportò cosa preziosa e degna' (*Cena* I.465). The last chapter examined ways in which Montaigne and Bruno attempted to further destabilise truth in their literature, in light of their existence in time and particularly when confronted with the idea of eternity. Bruno's quest for truth is a lonely one which must take place outside the bounds of custom and its influence in wider society.

Previous chapters have emphasised that the notion of change is central to understanding time in the works of Montaigne and Bruno, whether it is being referred to explicitly as *vicissitudine* or alluded to in a more general sense as a state of temporal flux. Custom manages to resist change for longer periods of time and clearly shapes the collective mindset of society in a negative manner with regards to truth-seeking. Prudenzius the stock pedant ignores the exciting, almost prophetic nature of this new truth that is going to be revealed, and instead quotes directly some lines from the *Disticha Catonis*, a popular Latin textbook used both in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance which lists various proverbs and morals.<sup>73</sup> Teofilo despairs at this generic response and then identifies it as one that carefully falls in line with customary ways of thinking: 'Questo è prudentissimamente detto in proposito del convitto e regimento comone' (*Cena* I.457). However, such words will not lead to 'la cognizione de la verità, e regola di contemplazione' (*Cena* I.457). Accepting received wisdom simply because it is customary to do so will not lead to the discovery of truth. Bruno considers this to be an alarming symptom of the times, that people prefer to spout lines because they are traditional rather than truthful - 'è consiglio che riguarda la moltitudine' (*Cena* I.457).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a similar sentiment arises in Montaigne's 'Du pedantisme' (I.XXV), which compares ancient Greek systems of education with the rote learning methods used by scholars in the 16th century. As in the *Cena*, a deeply anti-pedantic sentiment runs through the chapter, and at one point Montaigne remembers a friend of his whose knowledge derives entirely from books (i.e. the words of others), rather than being formed in his own mind too: 'J'en cognoy, à qui quand je demande ce qu'il sçait, il me demande un livre pour me le montrer' (I.XXV.137). Such an attitude leads Montaigne

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<sup>73</sup> See Ordine, p. 457.

to draw the same conclusions as Bruno with regards to received knowledge; the incident with his friend only serves to highlight the problem he identifies at the start of the chapter that ‘l’action de l’esprit, par trop d’estude et de matiere...perde le moyen de se desmeler’ (I.XXV.136). While pedantry is not linked to custom consistently in this chapter (the term ‘usage’ appears four times but is not always used in the sense of custom or habitual behaviour), Montaigne - like Bruno - is clearly mindful that a pattern of learning exists in the late 16th century which breeds an unquestioning acceptance of what has come before.

In this section I hope to have revealed the full extent to which Bruno and Montaigne are frustrated by the role of custom and its stagnating effect on the intellectual development of the rest of the society. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka was a phenomenologist interested in the problem of time who described the existence of the thinker thus: ‘[...] the reflective human being is pressed, impelled by the questioning bent of his or her beingness to wonder, to ask, to interrogate, to seek “reasons” for the turns of life’s route’.<sup>74</sup> For two thinkers writing fervently with an eye to seeking reasons for the ways of human existence, custom is an entity which strongly discourages the ‘questioning bent’ of the philosopher. Furthermore, in previous chapters I have illustrated that human existence in time is precarious and brief; death is a significant aspect of human time, and both thinkers accept this while simultaneously devoting themselves to an open-ended pursuit of truth. As human beings, both Montaigne and Bruno are aware that they are quite literally being timed in their pursuit of knowledge.<sup>75</sup> Therefore in light of human existence in time, custom can be frustrating quite simply because above all it is a waste of precious time.

### *The ambiguous nature of custom*

So far, this chapter has presented custom in an overtly negative light. Montaigne and Bruno portrayed custom in this way because they were distinctly aware of the barriers it presented to using time productively. As a result, both thinkers often expressed open

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<sup>74</sup> Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, ‘Editor’s Introduction: Timing Our Lives’ in *Temporality in Life as Seen Through Literature*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), pp. xiii-xix (p. xv).

<sup>75</sup> Ahmeti has previously commented on the brevity of time in the *Essais*: ‘Le thème de la brièveté du temps, omniprésent tout au long des Essais, tend à perpétuer ce sentiment d’angoisse chez Montaigne. D’ailleurs, le mot “angoisse” ne renvoie-t-il pas au terme latin “angustia” qui désigne un passage étroit, un lieu resserré, en parlant d’espaces physiques, mais en parlant aussi du temps qui se fait court?’ (‘Introduction’).

frustration with what they perceived to be the general decline of their society. In 'Du Jeune Caton' (I.XXXVII), Montaigne laments that 'ce siècle auquel nous vivons...est si plombé que, je ne dis pas l'exécution, mais l'imagination mesme de la vertu en est à dire' (I.XXXVII.230). Montaigne believes that people are no longer truly virtuous and that this is due in part to the proliferation of custom as habitude: 'le profit, la gloire, la crainte, *l'accoutumance* et autres telles causes estrangeres' (I.XXXVII.230) are defined as concepts which masquerade as virtuous, '[mais] elles n'en ont pas pourtant l'essence' (I.XXXVII.230).<sup>76</sup> Bruno shared a similar sense of disillusionment with 'questo confusissimo secolo' (*Cabala* II.477); the Scholastics in particular 'abomina il secolo presente' (*Spaccio* II.320) with their lack of understanding. Such attitudes would appear to fall entirely in line with the pronouncement by Richard Mulcaster (1531-1611), the English lexographer, that custom was 'a venim to all vertewes, and such a poison to all vertewous effects'.<sup>77</sup> However, 'poisonous' custom does also possess some advantages, rendering it a more complex concept than the discussion so far has allowed. In order to better understand this ambiguity, it is important to keep in mind the influence of the Wars of Religion and the fractured state of Christianity in Europe on how both thinkers approached custom.

Custom is not immune to time, and habitual behaviour and laws do eventually mutate. One significant upheaval which affected Montaigne's response to custom was the Reformation. The resulting Wars of Religion (1562-1598) which engulfed France in the late 1500s had a severe impact on Montaigne and the general tone of the *Essais*, particularly the first volume. Indeed, due to the bloody nature of the civil war, Montaigne is mainly concerned with *how* customs are overturned and in 'De la coustume' he famously errs on the side of caution, rather than advocating full legal reform. After a lengthy presentation of the disadvantages of custom, Montaigne performs an about-face and states that 'Je suis desgousté de la nouuelleté, quelque visage qu'elle porte, et ay raison, car j'en ay veu des effets tres-dommageables' (I.XXIII.119). At first glance his hatred of 'newness' falls entirely in line with the criticism we have seen throughout this chapter. However, the religious conflict has brought 'une si horrible corruption de meurs' (I.XXIII.120) that Montaigne begins to seriously consider the benefits of customs that have endured without leading to such bloody repercussions. Catholicism led by the Papacy is far preferable to the 'corruption de meurs' brought about by the bloody disputes between

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<sup>76</sup> Emphasis own.

<sup>77</sup> For more on this description of custom in Mulcaster's work, see Manley, pp. 67-68.

Catholics and Reformers, which reached its peak with the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572, a famous example of Catholic mob violence which killed anywhere between 5,000 and 30,000 Huguenots in Paris and the French provinces.

Custom, despite its disadvantages, reveals itself to be extremely complicated: 'Il y a grand à dire, entre la cause de celui qui suyt les formes et les loix de son pays, et celui qui entreprend de les regenter et changer' (I.XXIII.121). For Montaigne, the scale of violence he has witnessed in his own country is far from an acceptable method of undoing centuries-old religious convention: 'l'aller legitime est un aller froid, poissant et contraint, et n'est pas pour tenir bon à un aller licencieux et effrené' (I.XXIII.122). The chapter takes on a more practical air as Montaigne advances the idea that it is wrong to settle religious debates with violence: 'Est ce pas mal mesnagé, d'avancer tant de vices certains et connus, pour combattre des erreurs contestées et debatables?' (I.XXIII.120). The shadow of the civil war looms large across the final pages of 'De la coustume' and pits all of custom's less desirable effects against the massacre of thousands of people, both on and off the battlefield. In this sense, Montaigne emphasises the potential advantages of custom in the present moment.<sup>78</sup> Amidst his criticism of those who wish to change laws and upset societal order, he describes an ideal version of statehood:

[...] la discipline ordinaire d'un Estat qui est en sa santé, ne pourvoit pas à ces accidens extraordinaires: elle presuppose un corps qui se tient en ses principaux membres et offices, et un commun consentement à son observation et obeïssance. (I.XXIII.122)

Concerns over the dubious origins of laws disappear, and instead the practical advantages of a stable society appear preferable to the 'effets tres-dommeagables' of the religious wars. In yet another example of the manner in which the *Essais* reflect Montaigne's contradictions, doubts and changing opinions, custom re-emerges from the various criticisms that have previously been attributed to it and now represents a practical alternative to bloodshed.

Furthermore, Montaigne and Bruno both suggest that an individual may mould custom as habit or second nature in order to better him or herself. Some of Montaigne's most famous reflections on his own habits and tastes appear in 'De l'expérience' (III.XIII) - Langer refers to them as 'forms of personal habit, forms which preoccupied old age

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<sup>78</sup> For a detailed discussion of Montaigne's conservatism and its atemporality see Langer, 'Montaigne's Customs', pp. 91-92. Langer argues that in 'De la coustume' 'present law or custom is supreme precisely because of the feebleness of a first cause' (p. 91).

neglects to change'.<sup>79</sup> In opposition to the positive effects of custom's endurance in time, here the idea that custom may engender positive behavioural patterns stems from custom's ultimate mutability. The changing nature of custom is often as inconsequential as Montaigne's changing preferences in wine; in one of many examples from 'De l'expérience' that acknowledges the fluctuating, internal nature of habit, Montaigne observes that, without his conscious input into the matter, 'j'ay rechangé du blanc au claret, et puis du claret au blanc' (III.XIII.1102-1103). Montaigne is fascinated by the seeming arbitrariness of what is pleasing to him at each moment in time and goes on to devote entire passages to his changing culinary preferences. Personal custom may alter without Montaigne's intervention and instead 'De l'expérience' witnesses Montaigne 'collecting and naming, in his quirky, unmotivated way, the personal habits that make up his quotidian self'.<sup>80</sup> However, Montaigne also believes that second nature or habit can be consciously changed over time; for example in 'Que philosopher' (I.XX) Montaigne remarks that he had to teach himself to think about death regularly: 'aussi ay-je pris en coustume d'avoir, non seulement en l'imagination, mais continuellement la mort en la bouche' (I.XX.90).

Similarly, Bruno appears to suggest that sometimes, habit may be able to mould human *intellectus* in a positive manner. Custom is agreeable if it manages to mimic nature to a high degree: 'Ma è dignissima, perché è fondata sopra la consuetudine de mirar la vera luce (la qual consuetudine non può venir in uso alla moltitudine come è detto)' (*Furori* II.730). As long as custom doesn't affect 'libero passaggio e progresso di contemplazione' (*Furori* II.731), then the intellect may be trained by habit: 'cui l'intelletto è reso in abito e formato in atto' (*Furori* II.712); 'che vedersi possa per abito et atto di contemplazione' (*Furori* II.577). Such views were not unheard of in the 16th century and are famously summarised in a scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; addressing his mother, Gertrude, Hamlet implores her to break with habit: 'That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,/Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,/ [...] Refrain tonight,/And that shall lend a kind of easiness/To the next abstinence; the next more easy;/For use almost can change the stamp of nature'.<sup>81</sup> When circumstances demand, it is possible to change one's habits over time. Custom is still a force to be reckoned with, but over time its strength may actually be shaped towards a more productive type of behaviour.

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<sup>79</sup> Langer, 'Montaigne's Customs', p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>81</sup> Shakespeare, *The Three-Text Hamlet*, III.4.163-170.

Finally, in ‘Des Cannibales’ Montaigne provides us with one last humorous exploration of custom and whether it may well possess some benefits. The chapter’s overall ambiguity has already caused much debate amongst scholars, particularly concerning the original interpretation of the chapter as an illustration of the *bon sauvage*. Recently the Magniens have rejected this thesis by arguing that Montaigne includes an honest account of the more grisly and gruesome Native American traditions: ‘ses Indiens sont sanguinaires et cruels, anthropophages et polygames’.<sup>82</sup> However, one of the most famous ambiguities in the chapter concerns the role of custom in society, which in spite of all Montaigne’s criticism is still left for the reader to weigh up. The final line of this chapter produces the biggest question mark concerning Montaigne’s true feelings on the nature of custom when he offers a partially-forgotten remembrance of his conversation with three Native American tribesmen in Rouen.

The end of ‘Des Cannibales’ is well-known for its hazy account of the three visitors. Montaigne had previously compared the New World with the lost city of Atlantis, but this mythical illusion is quickly shattered when Montaigne reveals he encountered three of these primitive tribespeople himself.<sup>83</sup> Earlier in the chapter, Montaigne repeatedly emphasises the importance of clear eyewitness accounts that are unbiased, with no flourishes. He takes great pains to assure the reader that his own sources on the New World are reliable people who are not prone to ‘des inventions fauces’. However, the latter half of the chapter casts doubt on these claims, and in the last paragraph Montaigne seemingly fails to remember the conversation he had with one of the cannibals: ‘ils respondirent trois choses, d’où j’ay perdu la troisieme, et en suis bien marry; mais j’en ay encore deux en memoire’ (I.XXXI.213). Throughout most of ‘Des Cannibales’ Montaigne pursued a strategy of inversion by reflecting Native American customs onto his readers. However, here he performs a deliberate about-face and casts the shadow of doubt on the reliability of everything he has just related. Finally, Montaigne compounds the shift in perspective with a humorous remark on how the Native Americans don’t wear trousers: ‘Tout cela ne va pas trop mal: mais quoy, ils ne portent point de haut de chausses’ (I.XXXI.214). It is typical of Montaigne’s style and form that he leaves this remark hanging in the air - it is left to his readers to interpret the ending either as a simple joke or another parodic twist on the nature of custom.

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<sup>82</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonen (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 1423.

<sup>83</sup> In 1562, a party of three Native Americans visited Rouen during a tour of France. For more see Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien & Catherine Magnien-Simonen (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 1423.

Custom is a concept that helps to reveal the true complexity of the task that Montaigne and Bruno had set out in the latter half of Chapter Three. It also illustrates some of the closest points of connection between the two thinkers, particularly their depiction of the New World as occupying a different place in time due to its lack of custom in society, as well as their fascination with the idea of custom as poison. They are both concerned with custom as a potential obstacle on the journey towards a more meaningful use of the time at their disposal. In their approach to custom they are perhaps less controversial than in their responses to time from previous chapters, even touching on conventional 16th-century concerns including the ideas of habituation and the Fall. I also acknowledged that custom ultimately possesses an ambiguous role in their works, and in fact, they are not entirely free of the demands of custom themselves. Despite questioning custom's authority, and thus questioning what humans generally accept as right or wrong, neither thinker is able or indeed completely willing to escape 'following' custom to a certain degree. However, they still chiefly discuss custom in line with the framework of time that I have outlined in previous chapters, an approach which leaves their readers in no doubt that custom in all of its various contexts is an important concept which one must be aware of when attempting to reconcile oneself to the mutability of time.

## Conclusion

Mesnageons le temps; encore nous en reste-il beaucoup d'oisif et mal employé. Nostre esprit n'a volontiers pas assez d'autres heures à faire ses besongnes, sans se desassocier du corps en ce peu d'espace qu'il luy faut pour sa nécessité. (III.XIII. III5)

[...] a questa massa intiera, della qual consta questo globo, questo astro, non essendo conveniente la morte e la dissoluzione, ed essendo a tutta natura impossibile l'annichilazione, a tempi a tempi, con certo ordine, viene a rinovarsi, alterando, cangiando, le sue parti tutte. (*Cena* I.556)

In order to conclude this discussion about time, I begin by presenting two examples that summarise some of the key themes I have attempted to distill in this thesis. In the first quotation above, Montaigne laments the precious nature of time by dwelling once more on the dichotomy between the human mind and the human body. He claims that people are often guilty of using time in a wasteful manner. Nevertheless, the mind 'n'a pas assez d'autres heures à faire ses besongnes' and cannot 'disassociate' itself from the body; bodily time - which must always come to an end - is unable to provide the mind with enough space to process all of its reflections and thoughts. Montaigne favours an approach to time that concentrates on individual experience, particularly one that understands the difference between bodily time and the mind that it houses. The second quotation by Bruno continues to work within the now-familiar conceptual framework of bodies in time. However, unlike Montaigne, he suggests that time does not render bodies extinct. In this example, Bruno argues that 'la morte e la dissoluzione' of divine, celestial bodies does not occur and instead, time causes the parts of these bodies to change and renew rather than perish forever. Time acquires a circular characteristic; it is based on a process of renewal, rather than a linear order. Bruno must incorporate time into a universe made up of infinite bodies and, in doing so, he understands that time can no longer be expressed in conventional terms of death and annihilation. Embodied time becomes malleable time thanks to the power of human *intellectus*, to the extent that death and duration can be redefined altogether.

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that Montaigne and Bruno approached the question of time in a way that often defied the temporal concerns of their age. The quotations included above are just two examples which serve to illustrate some of the decidedly unconventional approaches to time that I have identified over the course of this thesis. I first examined the idea that humans must navigate a dual path between their mortal bodies and their awareness not only of their individual mortality, but also of time



in general, whether past, present or future. Furthermore, I argued that Montaigne and Bruno manipulated this ability to reflect on time in such a way that they proposed exciting and innovative new ways of thinking about time. In doing so they ignored or even destroyed the foundations of 16th century time; the Afterlife was replaced by infinite duration, eternity or God's time was deemed irrelevant, suicide was presented as an act of control over time and time itself was defined in mutable terms that had more in common with classical atomism than Christian-Scholastic eschatology.

The initial research problem that inspired this thesis highlighted the fact that present-day criticism about 16th century time does not reflect any such radical conceptions of time. While it may be true that modern-day scholarship on Renaissance time has received little attention in comparison to other historical periods, in the Introduction I highlighted the fact that only a few key temporal trends are ever associated with the 16th century. Studies inevitably discuss chronology and precursors to the development of a scientific Newtonian method of measuring time; apocalyptic ends of time encompassing Christian eschatology and the idea of the Renaissance as a period that was constantly looking back in time to Antiquity. For example, Donald J. Wilcox portrays the period as one which was trying to reconcile the Classical past with the Renaissance present, while Jon E. Roedeliein argues that in the period between Aquinas' death and the 17th century, 'scholarship was estimated more highly than originality'.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, the importance of the 16th century is ignored altogether, particularly in general histories of time. As a response to such assertions, I have sought to broaden the general patterns associated with 16th-century time and renew an interest in this period by investigating how and why certain thinkers were clearly deviating from conventional models in their understanding of temporality. Several research questions naturally emerged from this initial thesis statement. Why are Michel de Montaigne and Giordano Bruno particularly good examples of two thinkers who were defying conventional approaches to time? What is the alternative conception of time that they propose and how does it differ from 16th-century temporal concerns previously established by modern-day scholarship on Renaissance time? Finally, how does this understanding of time affect certain aspects of Montaigne's and Bruno's thought? In attempting to answer these questions, I hope to have demonstrated that 16th-century conceptions of time were far more complex and thought-provoking than has previously been suggested.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), p. 156; Jon E. Roedeliein, *The Concept of Time in Psychology: A Resource Book and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 26.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the most pressing research question I proceeded to answer concerned my justification of Montaigne and Bruno as the primary subjects of this study. At the start of this thesis, I acknowledged that both thinkers were, in many respects, rather different in terms of both their biographical context and the main aspects of philosophy that they wished to pursue. However, they both represent excellent examples of Renaissance thinkers whose thought has been notoriously difficult to pin down. I first suggested in the Introduction that Bruno is primarily a natural philosopher, but one who was also interested in the art of memory, mathematics and - as Frances Yates famously suggested - the esoteric tradition of Hermeticism.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Italian dialogues are an example of a series of texts in which Bruno was experimenting with literary convention; the *Eroici Furori*, for example, combines 'for the first and the last time in Italian literature, the dialogue of the Platonic love treatise with the earlier tradition of prose commentary upon verses'.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Montaigne cannot be described as a conventional philosopher due to his refusal to commit to any one school of thought. And yet he is clearly interested in and educated in the modes of enquiry that philosophy offers. In Chapter One I also highlighted aspects of their biographical and historical context in the late 16th century, particularly Bruno's relationship to authority and Montaigne's tragic family life, in order to further emphasise their position as outsiders who would not have felt particularly beholden to the establishment (i.e. the universities) when expressing thoughts on time. I combined their unique positions as thinkers who defied conventional classification with the context that influenced their innovative writing style in order to justify why I believed that their approach to time would yield a similar level of originality.

This naturally led to the task of answering the most significant research question related to this study - establishing what exactly the conception of time was that Montaigne and Bruno presented in the works at hand. In order to do so, I proceeded from a conceptual framework of bodies in time which helped me to address how both thinkers present the individual human experience and perception of time. From the outset, the reality of time itself is never in doubt as the images that Montaigne and Bruno draw upon serve to reaffirm its visible manifestations. In Chapter One, we saw that Montaigne's imagery revolves around the microcosm of the human body, while Bruno's primary interest lies in the macrocosm of bodily change inherent within the entire

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<sup>2</sup> See Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964); on Bruno and mathematics see Arielle Saiber, *Giordano Bruno and the Geometry of Language* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, trans. by Paul Eugene Memmo (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Pr., 1964), p. 21.

universe. In both of these cases, mutability reveals itself to be a key attribute of time. In the *Essais*, existence in time is primarily defined by the physical processes of ageing and death, while for Bruno time is the constant change of vicissitude which constantly shapes and reshapes matter, from human bodies to rivers and mountains. Furthermore, this understanding of time only serves to emphasise human weakness - humans are powerless to try and alter the workings of time. However, if time is an objective phenomenon that merely facilitates physical change to bodies, how does it evoke such powerful responses from human beings? Montaigne and Bruno understand the significance of this question and express an acute awareness of the human perception of time, in which embodied time becomes further complicated by the mind or *intellectus* which is able to successively contemplate past, present and future.

I then began to establish how this juncture is further explored by examining responses to future time. Interestingly, Montaigne and Bruno identify fear of death as a typical and natural mental response to future time. However, they both dismiss its relevance and demonstrate that fear doesn't have to dictate human responses to the future. Bruno uses fear of death as a means of demonstrating the radical temporality of his own cosmological position which denies that death exists. The body is not destroyed forever, leaving the soul to depart for Heaven. Instead, time is a cyclical process of which 'death' in the traditional sense merely represents another change of state. The future is not to be feared since bodies, including our own body, will continue to exist and endure in different forms forever. Meanwhile, Montaigne wishes to show that humans can exert some degree of control over future time. The manner in which he presents his near-death experience suggests that humans may be able to straddle the time between life and death physically; he also uses Socrates and Cato the Younger to put forth suicide as an act that allows an individual to dictate the terms of their death, even if death itself cannot be prevented. What initially appeared in Chapter One to be a rigid and linear plane of time has suddenly become malleable. This conception of time was compounded in the final instance by an analysis of how Montaigne and Bruno proposed to live in time. Another similarity emerges as - for different reasons - introspection is put forward as one of the best ways to react productively to an existence defined by temporal mutability. Montaigne's introspection is a response to the world in temporal flux; although his own body and mind are constantly changing, he can at least reliably record these changes and thus in doing so manages to capture the essence of the present moment in writing. Bruno's introspection is a deliberate attempt to try and gain access to divine knowledge, to something that exists on a higher plane than temporal impermanence. The eternal World

Soul binds all temporal beings together, thus Bruno believes that studied introspection is a clear path to higher knowledge. While the chances of actually attaining this knowledge are slim due to the precious nature of human time, there is nothing for Montaigne and Bruno to conclude except that one must continue forth anyway.

A closely-related research question asked why this conception of time was so different from the temporality of their peers. The understanding of time that I detailed in Chapters One, Two and Three immediately conflicted with patterns that have already been explored by modern-day scholars. Rather than an emphasis on the centrality of Christian eschatology, or an insistence on 16th-century time as a precursor to Newtonian advancements, I focused on the immediacy of time as it reveals itself to the individual. In the first instance, embodied time is a relatively unusual concept to begin a thesis on 16th-century time. However, this was a necessary response to the nature of the primary source evidence, which was constantly uncovering ways in which bodies physically existed in time. Change, mutability and ageing were key characteristics not only of the human body but indeed all bodies including mountains, trees, rivers, the weather, seasons and even atoms. Montaigne and Bruno were clearly approaching the body in a different way to their peers - rather than relegating it to a mere vessel for the soul, they used it to understand the nature of time. Chapter Two demonstrated that standard 16th-century conceptions of future time also held little relevance for Montaigne and Bruno. In demonstrating the radical temporality of his own philosophy, Bruno denied the existence of the Afterlife, a concept which was still vitally important in the 16th century. The traditional linearity of time disappeared; death was not to be feared, since it was not a final change of state before the soul disappeared to Heaven. Instead, everything in the universe was connected intimately in time, a realisation of all possible forms being reformed forever; it resembled a cyclical conception of time with no room for the time after death. Meanwhile, Montaigne's response to the future was unconventional due to his attempts to put philosophy on the nature of death to more practical use. His own near-death experience - and subsequent account of it years later - undermined the finality of death, while in theological terms, suicide was an extremely taboo topic which Montaigne used to highlight the degree of choice that humans were given with regard to death. Arguably, thinkers who deny the existence of death or suggest the possibility of returning from a state between life and death are still radical today. In the 16th century, Bruno's cosmology had no space or time to incorporate the Afterlife. His denial of a Christian time after death was considered to be a clear form of heresy, and would later be seized upon by the inquisitors in Bruno's trial. Meanwhile, Montaigne was willing to openly discuss near-

death experience and suicide - an act which the Church was desperately trying to clamp down on - in order to inform his understanding of time.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, in Chapter Three eternity is either largely ignored (in Montaigne's case) or manipulated in such a way that it is incorporated into Bruno's heretical universe. For Bruno, eternity no longer represents God's time in a traditional sense - God does not reside in an eternal state outside the Earth. Instead eternity binds temporal bodies through the World Soul. Montaigne's interest in his body and his experience of time supersedes any interest in eternity; he emphasises that humans will never experience eternity, whereas they experience change every single day. Without approaching the issues from the same philosophical background, Montaigne reveals a similar degree of interest in vicissitude as Bruno, who articulates time in terms of change, mutation and flux. Indeed, the key to understanding time in the *Essais* and the Italian dialogues lies in temporal flux, a concept that, amongst other philosophical currents, brings with it various shades of atomism, a school of thought that was still novel in the late 16th century: 'Ainsi l'homme, à titre individuel, a prise sur le temps'.<sup>5</sup> Accepting the nature of time as a process of constant change allows both thinkers to contemplate how best they can put this time to use. While the analysis of custom put forth brief instances of ways in which Montaigne and Bruno engaged more with typical 16th-century concerns, it is clear that both thinkers consistently showed a disregard or even open criticism of general conceptions of time. While I was careful to emphasise where Montaigne and Bruno were acknowledging more conventional notions of time in the 16th century, this was nearly always tempered by a realisation that what they were doing with these notions was decidedly different.

Finally, I wished to briefly examine how such a conception of time might impact on other aspects of their thought. The aim of accessing higher knowledge sounds extremely lofty and noble, but it also appeared to be a somewhat abstract conclusion to a conception of time that had originally considered time in such physical terms. Custom was an important theme in the early modern period that certain jurists had already begun to define in relation to time, particularly the idea of long usage. It also allowed me to outline some of the more practical obstacles that might interfere with the idea of meaningful knowledge-seeking. Analysis of customary law and second nature in the *Essais*

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<sup>4</sup> See Patrick Henry, 'The Dialectic of Suicide in Montaigne's "Coustume de l'Isle de Cea"', *The Modern Language Review*, 79.2 (1984), pp. 278-289 (p. 279). Rising suicide rates across Europe led the Church to respond 'in the *Catechisme du Concile de Trente*, by proscribing suicide 'sans aucune réserve' (p. 279).

<sup>5</sup> Marie-Madeleine de La Garandière, 'La méditation philosophique sur le temps au XVIème siècle: Budé, Montaigne' in *Le Temps et la Durée dans la littérature au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance*, ed. by Yvonne Bellenger (Paris: Nizet, 1986), pp. 193-209 (p. 201).

and the Italian dialogues reveals a shared concern over the relationship between custom and time. Montaigne and Bruno are both heavily critical of custom due to its relationship to time, especially how it uses time to affect the judgement of wider society when confronted with *novità* and also the manner in which it uses long usage to shape individual behaviour to its own will. Although there are instances in which they engage with conventional temporality, their concerns can be clearly traced back to the framework of time described in Chapters One, Two and Three. Custom wastes time when time should be put to good use; it uses time to cloud judgement which makes the path to higher knowledge more difficult; custom can even substitute itself for the workings of nature through habitual behaviour. In criticising the nature of custom, I established some of the most notable similarities between Montaigne and Bruno. They draw on the same metaphors of custom as poison, and lament the manner in which young children are raised in the customs of their households.

I began by suggesting a new conceptual framework that proceeded from the idea of embodied time and developed further layers of complexity from this initial foundation. Clearly the question of time in the 16th century was in fact highly intricate and provoked responses that were rooted in other concerns related to the human body, change, inner time and a need to feel control over time. I have examined how and why Montaigne and Bruno appear to accept the reality of time by exploring its most visible and significant effects on human beings and indeed the world around them. In doing so, I have shed light on significant responses to time. Rather than passively accepting the linear time of Christianity or constructing time in a manner which pre-empts the concerns of Enlightenment thinkers, Montaigne and Bruno consider time in an individual and perceptive way that leads them to test their own experience of time.

The main conceptual methodology that drove the central argument of this thesis was a response to the body of scholarship that has already attempted to probe the question of 16th-century time. As I acknowledge in the Introduction, some excellent work has already been done in this area, particularly by Ricardo Quinones, John Spencer Hill and J.K. Barret. I hope to have contributed to this body of work with the findings and conceptual framework used in this thesis. In both the Introduction and Chapter One in particular, I alluded to the fact that, prior to the writing of this thesis, several modern-day scholars had already suggested an aporia between the idea of a mortal body and a mind which is able to reflect on its own mortality. Ian Maclean and Michele Ciliberto have reflected on this idea, while scholars such as Hélène Védrine and Paul-Henri Michel have previously mentioned this idea in passing. In this thesis, I wanted to explore this

dichotomy in more detail, particularly since the initial stages of my research quickly revealed an interest in bodies in time while simultaneously searching for ways to respond to time. How exactly was it confronted by Montaigne and Bruno? What were the implications of such a conundrum? I hope to have shown that far from triggering a morbid reflection on the certainty of death or other existential crisis, both thinkers thrive on exploiting this particular characteristic of human existence in time. Furthermore, I also assessed the primary source evidence where time is discussed without a pre-conceived desire to fit Montaigne and Bruno neatly into a Christian-Scholastic approach. I have demonstrated that it is possible to find meaningful responses to time in the 16th century without the need to frame these responses within a pre-arranged template.

I have also shown that it is possible to directly compare these two thinkers and uncover valuable new research in doing so. In terms of the contribution to knowledge that this thesis has made, I strongly believe that my research has helped to identify new connections between Montaigne and Bruno. They both possess a shared interest in the way in which continual change and movement confirms the existence of time, and are keenly aware of how this will affect their practical use of time. I also suggested that a tentative resolution to human existence in temporal flux was the idea of introspection. Admittedly these forms of introspection come from two very different philosophical places - Bruno believes that the World Soul is physically emanating through everything and everyone, and thus to turn inwardly is to turn towards divine substance. Montaigne attempts to know the only thing he is capable of knowing - himself - by recording his own thoughts and behaviour day-to-day, despite accepting the fact that he is an inexhaustible source of knowledge. However, the turn towards introspection in order to exploit the time at hand reveals a shared acceptance of the reality of time, which clearly reaches its apotheosis in death. Furthermore, I hope to have shown that it is possible to make these connections without a prior need to work from Fulvio Papi's original discussion in *Antropologia e civiltà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (1968).<sup>6</sup> Papi identified veiled references to Montaigne in Bruno's *Spaccio* and pursued this connection through an examination of their responses to the newly-discovered Native Americans (see also Introduction, 'Literature Review'). While there are a handful of modern-day scholars who have established similar links between the two thinkers around this theme in smaller articles and book chapters, I believe that it is possible to make a promising comparison between Montaigne and Bruno without working chiefly from Papi's excellent foundation.

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<sup>6</sup> Fulvio Papi, *Antropologia e civiltà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), Chapter 7 - 'La civiltà come dignità dell'uomo'.

Instead, I have sought to shed light on new connections between the two thinkers by emphasising their desire to theorise time beyond even its most stable and universal characteristics. The most striking similarities emerged towards the end of Chapter Three and Chapter Four when I attempted to understand how they might practically attempt to use time to their advantage. Both Montaigne and Bruno were considering existence in time through a lens of mutability; they were aware of the limitations of human time but also wanted to surpass these limitations and in doing so they both proposed forms of introspection as a way to exist in time. Ironically, this particular conclusion is an inversion of Papi's main concern about the two thinkers - namely, that they often arrive at different conclusions based on exactly the same evidence.<sup>7</sup> In this case, their response to time is similar but is shaded by different philosophical viewpoints. Nevertheless, these findings, alongside the evidence concerning custom and its manipulation of human judgement, have shed new light on an emerging field of research and have also proposed a different way to compare the two thinkers. Furthermore, I hope that by exploring the relationship between time and custom in Bruno's and Montaigne's work I have provoked a renewed interest in this theme. I do not focus solely on custom in its legal context or as a type of second nature and instead link it more clearly to time and epistemological concerns.

Despite these contributions, it must also be acknowledged that there were certain limitations in this study that may affect one's ability to apply these particular research outcomes to a more general pattern of 16th century time. One of the areas which only partially supported the idea that Montaigne and Bruno were approaching time differently to their peers was in Montaigne's understanding of eternity. His representation of eternity was less a way of experimenting with eternity than avoiding it altogether due to its irrelevance to Montaigne's project of documenting himself in time. However, arguably this omission in itself served to reinforce his clear interest in the visible images he could identify from himself and the world around him in order to understand the passing of time. Furthermore, I used two thinkers to test the main thesis statement of this study, and while I hope to have demonstrated that they were undoubtedly working outside the conventions of their age, it may be useful to extend this study to the works of other 16th-century thinkers. For example, this thesis naturally focused on patterns related to French and Italian philosophical currents during this time, acknowledging the influence of the Wars of Religion on the continent, and the calendrical reforms. However, throughout my research, the thoughts of English philosophers from this time period have frequently

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<sup>7</sup> See Papi, p. 350.



appeared on the surface, particularly in Chapter Four with the discussion of time and custom.

In light of these considerations, I feel that in the future there is still scope for further research in this particular area of study. While I believe that the English Renaissance has fared much better in terms of studies available on time during this period, it would be interesting to compare how the presentation of time in the works of Shakespeare compared to his peers on the continent, and whether the concept of embodied time may be relevant to his thought. Shakespeare often reappeared during my research, particularly in relation to time and custom in *Hamlet*, and the prior links to both Montaigne and Bruno through the English lexicographer John Florio (1553-1625) may help to cement a valuable study on time and strengthen the connections between Montaigne and Bruno.<sup>8</sup> In terms of other thinkers whose thoughts on time may represent a certain degree of originality, Louis Le Roy may be a worthwhile subject of future study. A closer analysis of his thoughts on the relationship between custom and time may well help to further support or explain some of the ideas of time found in this thesis, particularly since he was also interested in vicissitude.

The conceptual framework of embodied time may also be a useful way to approach time in the works of Montaigne's fellow French humanists, particularly François Rabelais (1494-1553) and Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585). Rabelais was another thinker who arguably defied literary norms; the *Tiers Livre* (1546) has been described as an 'anti-book' due to its unique disregard for plot in favour of lively erudite debate; it is a fictional work that depicts time within the context of human anxiety over an uncertain future.<sup>9</sup> In the *Sonnets pour Hélène* (1578) Ronsard demonstrates the same awareness of his ageing self as Montaigne by weaving in references to his white hair and aged skin amongst his courtly love poetry.<sup>10</sup> Would the concept of embodied time lead to similar or different conclusions in the works of other 16th century thinkers? There may be a link between the tendency of certain thinkers to innovate through genre or use of the vernacular and the development of a more individual conception of time, a connection which future studies may well be advised to explore. Furthermore, it may be interesting to examine to what extent this

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<sup>8</sup> Gilberto Sacerdoti has produced excellent work on Bruno and Shakespeare in the field of cosmology and politics. See Gilberto Sacerdoti, *Nuovo cielo, nuova terra: la rivelazione copernicana di Antonio e Cleopatra di Shakespeare* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1990) and *Sacrificio e sovranità: teologia e politica nell'Europa di Shakespeare e Bruno* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Barbara C. Bowen, *The Age of Bluff: paradox and ambiguity in Rabelais and Montaigne* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 83. See also François Rabelais, *Le tiers livre*, ed. by Guy Demerson (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Pierre de Ronsard, *Les Amours*, ed. by Albert-Marie Schmidt & Françoise Joukovsky (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), pp. 279-360.

conception of time remains unchanged or evolves over the course of Bruno's later works. While I have already included some excerpts both from the *Acrotismus Camoeracensis* and *De immenso*, it could be useful to consider whether the switch back to Latin and Bruno's continued exile in Europe helped to shape his views on time, especially as the Latin works from this period are often cited as a further step towards exploring Bruno's interest in atomism. Lastly, a more detailed exploration of chronological layers in the *Essais* would help to distill further instances of temporality in Montaigne's text by analysing the changing meaning of certain terms over time, particularly in relation to 'nature' and 'reason'.

What has remained abundantly clear throughout the course of my research is the fact that time in the 16th century is a highly complex area of study which has still not yet been fully explored. This issue has often seemed incomprehensible given the universal nature of time and the relevance it continues to hold today. Alongside recent promising studies from Simona Cohen, J.K. Barret and a special edition on time of the *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, it is hoped that this thesis has gone one more step towards distilling the true complexity of attitudes towards time in the Renaissance. Learning about and thinking about time will always be relevant. Time in the 16th century can still inform modern-day readers about important temporal concepts, albeit through a prism of less familiar context. Montaigne and Bruno were discussing mortality and how one might learn to confront this, as well as how humans process the reality of time and their place within the temporal world. Here I have begun to lay claim to the idea that Montaigne and Bruno were two examples of extraordinary thinkers whose originality of thought and unconventional approach to time arguably still challenges our understanding of time today. It certainly could not have been more different from the philosophical and theological currents of their own age.

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